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THE DRIVEN

By Edward Robbins

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PREFACE

It has taken twenty-two years for this book to be written.

There was a great hurt inside of me which has somehow mellowed with time. It was not until the scars of the torment were nearly healed that I could tell the story.

The first part was the hardest. It was the most painful to write. For a long time I felt that stories like mine had been told and retold and there was no need for another. Yet there has been a drive within me to tell this one.

At the old age of fourteen when this book ends, I hated everyone and everything and most of all myself. I felt the world to be divided into two camps--the Jews and the non-Jews. The non-Jews meant animals--animals who only knew how to inflict pain and destruction.

I have grown somewhat since then and no longer divide my world quite in the same way. I have a common dream--a dream that is shared by so many people--that maybe someday there will be no need for hate.

It is for the sake of this dream that this story was written.

Edward Robbins

INTRODUCTION

Rather than attempt to be historically accurate, the author of this book felt that it would be important to detail the story "as the child saw it." And yet, as one studies the history of the "lost provinces" of Bukovina and Basserabia, one has to be impressed at how accurate the child's recollections really are.

Bassarabia and Bukovina had a Jewish population in 1939 of approximately 300,000. It was in Bassarabia that the Jews suffered the impact of the Rumanian need to demonstrate to the Germans that they would be as good, if not better, "Jew killers."

Initially the Romanians, in August 1941, decided to shove the Bassarabian Jews across the Dniester River into what was then German-occupied territory. Their purpose was to have the Einsatzgruppe D, a force of 600 Germans charged with the destruction of the Ukranian Jews, almost as a sideline also kill any other Jews that might be in the area. After some 15,000 Jews were driven across the river, the German 11th Army gave orders to block traffic over the Dniester bridgehead at Mogilev-Podolsk, but the Rumanians on the other side blocked the way back.

In the initial phase of The Driven the boy is part of this process of being shoved back and forth. Thousands died from exhaustion, hunger and gunfire on that endless march.

The Germans were disenchanted with the Rumanian method of killing Jews. A July 25, 1941, Einsatzgruppe report reads: "There would be nothing to say against numerous execution of Jews if it were not that the technical preparation and the method of execution is defective. The Rumanians leave the executed peoples where they have fallen without burying them." There are many reports which complain of too much Rumanian zeal, lack of planning and too much looting. But this problem was overcome and Otto Ohlendorf's killers were successful in killing 90,000 Bassarabian Jews.

But the Rumanians did fairly well on their own. In Odessa alone the Rumanians were responsible for the slaughter of 60,000 Jews.

The squabble between Germany and Rumania over who had a better system for killing Jews finally came to an end when in August of 1941 the Tighina Agreement was finally reached. This agreement created Tran~~s~~nistria, between the Bu~~r~~g and Dniester rivers, as a temporary dumping ground for Jews from Bassarabia and Bukovina. A variety of camps were established. Among the better known were Pechora, Tulchin, Balta, Berslad, Golta, Yampol, Mgailer-Podolsk, Rimnitsa and Tiraspol.

The camps in Tranistria were among the most appalling in Europe. But Bogdnovka, in the Golta perfecture, was Rumania's greatest death center. Within one week 48,000 Jews were massacred.

Against this background, Part I of this story was written. Some have said that it stands on its own. But to have ended the book there would have suggested that the saga of the Jewish people ended with the end of World War II. The truth is something far different.

At the end of World War II an entire new chapter of Jewish history began. As if Hitler hadn't achieved his objective, the nations of the world started playing "Jewish football" and once again began to toss Jews from place to place like toys with no owners.

DP's were all over Europe. The "wandering Jew" once again, and perhaps this time for the last time, began to seek and to struggle for a permanent home.

Part II of The Driven is the story of a child's minute role in the painful melodrama.

PART I

THE RUSSIANS COME

The day was glorious! After such a long winter, to really see the sun and the beginning of green grass made me feel very happy. I got my best wagon rim and stick and decided to roll the rim all the way to the end of our street where my friend Chaim lived.

As I ran, I saw people on the sidewalks—even in the middle of the street—standing in little groups and talking. What was going on?

All of a sudden, a wagon filled with five Rumanian soldiers went by. It sounded like thunder on the cobblestones. I ran behind a group of old men and crouched down so I could see the dust of the horses' hooves as the wagon sped away.

"So it was true," the old man beside me said. "The soldiers are gone. What will happen now? Will the Russians come?" he asked no one in particular.

The word was passed along until everyone on the street knew that Bessarabia no longer belonged to Rumania and that their soldiers had left. What was to become of us?

A few days went by and finally we learned the news. My papa heard that the Russians were taking over our tiny country. Soon strange people who had been locked away for years began to appear in our town. Old people, diseased people, were released from dark damp cells. They said we would have freedom we had never had before, that we would know a truly good life now that the Russians were in charge.

On the fifth day after the soldiers left, June 5, 1940, the

Rumanian newspapers told us that the Rumanians had ceded Bessarabia, under pressure, to Russia.

Some people in our town were happy, but most, including my father, were scared. What would this mean for the Jews? What would happen to us?

I didn't know, but I wondered who the Russian soldiers were with their handsome uniforms and their bright red flags.

AT MY GRANDMOTHER'S

One Saturday I visited my grandmother. When it was time for my nap, I went to her old-fashioned high bed and lay down. I wasn't really sleepy, so I heard people come into the other room. Soon I heard voices. I listened carefully. Someone was crying. It was my Aunt Goldie, my father's oldest sister. All at once I heard my mother's voice. Why was she here? She was crying too. This was Shabbath afternoon, a happy time, a peaceful time. Why were they crying? I went to the door and opened it slowly and quietly.

They were all sitting, my grandmother, my aunts, my mother and my papa, all of them, with sad faces and tears rolling down their cheeks. I ran up to my mother and hugged her. Almost without seeing me, she said, "Your Aunt Riva Leah has been taken away. They have taken her away!" She repeated this over and over. Each time she did, the louder her crying became. My grandmother pulled me away and told her not to frighten me. Everyone began to cry louder and I felt even more scared.

My grandmother took me back into the bedroom and put me on the pillow. "Grandmother, will they take us away too?" I asked in a frightened voice.

"Sleep, Imic, sleep, little boy, and don't worry about tomorrow. God will take care of his children.

THE TELEPHONE CALL

Great excitement today. My mother had received a telephone call. In all of Brichen there was one telephone. Only very important people had ever received a call. The telephone was in the post office. When a call came in, a runner was dispatched with the message. But today was different. The messenger told my mother that the caller must talk to her himself. No one knew who it was.

My mother and father both went immediately to the post office. My father had told me to stay with my grandmother, but as soon as they were out of the house I ran out the back door and went to the fire station, which was next door to the post office. I sneaked in through the loose board in the fence behind the two buildings. The window was open. Not only could I see the telephone, but I could hear my mother's voice.

"Yes, this is Chava Raboi. Who is this calling? Oh," she said, turning to my father, "it's Israel Slutshy....Yes, yes, I hear you, but be careful what you're saying--someone else will hear you.... Yes, Riva Leah has gone, what shall we do?" She held the phone for a long time and stood there, not talking. Finally she hung up. She began to cry.

I was really afraid now. I hurried back through the fence and arrived at my grandmother's house just as my mother and father turned the corner. I ran to my grandmother and buried my head in her apron. When she saw my mother and father she picked me up and we all went inside the house. I ran to hide under the bed.

"Chava," my grandmother said, "what is it? What has happened? Who was the caller?"

"It was Israel Slutshy," my mother replied.

"The Communist? The one who moved to Lipcon? Why would he call you?"

"To warn us, to tell us what has happened to Riva Leah. Israel told me he was wrong about the Party. He wants to help us now that he knows what the Communists want to do with the Jews. He said to get out while we can. They would take Riva Leah and many more to Siberia because they wanted to get rid of rich people. He told me that before long all of us would be taken."

"But he's a Communist. Why would he want to help us? It's a trick," my grandmother said.

"No, no!" My mother began to scream. "He's telling the truth! I didn't tell him Riva Leah was gone. He knew! He helped make the plans. We have to leave now!"

"But, Chava," my father said, "where will we run? We have our whole family here. If we run away and they find us, they could send us to Siberia. Maybe," his voice got softer, "maybe if we stay they will leave us alone."

I never heard anyone laugh again for the next three years.

That night at midnight we heard screams and loud knocking. My father ran to the window. "Oh, my God," he said, "they have come to take away Meyer Kaufman."

My mother and I moved to the window and looked. I saw the longest black car I had ever seen, and four big men with black leather coats and shiny pistols that flashed in the moonlight. Soon Meyer Kaufman, his wife Sarah, and their two sons Jack and Leonard came out of the house, walking in front of the four men. They got into the black car, crying and screaming for help. I was so sick inside with fear that I began to tremble.

My mother and father got back into bed. They spent the rest of the night trying to decide what to do.

Every few nights for the next two months, five more families would be missing. They were allowed to take no money, no food, no personal belongings—only the clothes they wore. Their homes were left behind unchanged, and it looked as though the family had just gone out together for a walk.

By this time all our family had moved to my mother's parents' house because it was the largest. If they came to get us, my father said, they would have to take us all together. Every night I slept with my parents, but we didn't sleep much. I listened for that knock on the door and tried to understand what we had donw that was so bad that we would have to be taken away from all the things we had in the world.

Then it stopped. No one came, no one left. All the stores were closed, the streets were empty. We waited, but nothing happened. My father decided we should go back to our own house. We could eat the vegetables from the garden—there was nowhere else to get food.

We went home and waited.

GOOSEFEATHERS

We stayed inside our house for seventeen days and went out only to gather the vegetables. There were no newspapers or radio, so none of us knew what was happening. All we knew was that no one else had been taken away.

On the eighteenth day, my father said he felt it was safe to go out again. We went to my grandmother's house early that morning. It was like nothing had ever happened. She hugged and kissed me the way she always did. My aunts, uncles and cousins arrived and I ran to get on the high bed where I had spent so many happy hours. Each member of the family had brought food. My mother had brought our garden vegetables and we had a feast of chicken, brisket, vegetables and hot homemade bread.

Just as we were finishing our first real meal in all those days, my grandmother suddenly said, "Sha, sha! Listen!" I heard a sound like no other I have ever heard. It was like a million drums, like the thunder of the worst storm. I put my hands over my ears and began to cry. I ran to my mother and buried my head in her skirt.

My grandmother was shouting, "It's a pogrom, it's a progrom! It's happening to us. Quick," she continued, "hitch the horses to the wagon and drive it to the front of the house." As the men ran to do that job, my grandmother told my mother, aunts and cousins to slit the goosefeather pillows and down comforters from all the beds and scatter them all over the front yard and porch of the house.

Everyone moved fast to gather the pillows and comforters and feathers were flying everywhere.

By this time, the whole family was back in the house with the doors locked tightly. The noise was getting closer. I peeked through the lace curtains and saw what seemed like hundredes of horse-drawn wagons, their metal wheel rims hitting the cobblestones, coming closer and closer. The wagons slowed down in front of the house. It wasn't the Russians at all. It was the farmers who lived right outside of our town. Their wagons were piled high with furniture, silver, Persian rugs and other things that belonged to the Jews of our town. Why were they here and what did they want?

"Drive on," the farmer shouted to the man with him. "Someone has already been here. See the feathers and the horse and wagon? Someone is here now," and then they drove away.

We were all delirious with joy at having deceived the looters, but soon another wagon slowed down in front of the house. Two men jumped off and came to the front door. There was a loud knock and a man's voice shouted to my father, "Karlon, Karlon, open this door."

"No, Velvel, it's a trick," my grandmother said. "Do not go to the door."

The voice again. "Open up!"

My father looked out of the window and recognized the man. He was the son of the farmer my father had known and done business with for many years. "Open up or I'll knock this door down."

My father walked slowly to the door and opened it. Then it happened. His friend's son struck him with a wooden club and knocked him down. I ran to my father, no longer afraid, only wanting to hurt the man who had hurt him. I grabbed a brick from the hearth and threw it as hard as I could. He yelled with pain as the brick hit his shin and started after me with the club. "You rotten little bastard, I'll get you!" he shouted. His friend stopped him. "Let's get the things and get out of here. We have a lot more stops to make."

They began to carry out my grandmother's furniture piece by piece and load it on the wagon. After the good furniture, they took the silver. The candlesticks were still on the table and they fell off as they carried out the massive dining room table to the wagon; they rolled under the curtains, all that was left of my grandmother's silver.

I couldn't understand why my family just stood together and watched this thing happen. Why were they so afraid? My father looked sad. His face was white and his hands were shaking. I asked him why the man who was his friend's son knocked him down. "Quiet, Imic," he said faintly. "Someday you will understand."

THE BURYING

All afternoon we had sat huddled together, trying to map out some way to survive now that the pogrom had started. Chaim Leib, my father's youngest brother, had the most to say.

"I have an idea," Chaim Leib said to my parents. "At dark we will, one by one, cross the road to your house. No wagon can get to the house because of the house right in front. So you will be safe from looters for a while. Tonight we'll dig a grave in the stable and bury all the valuables in the cedar chest. When they do come, at least there will be no reward for them." My father nodded in agreement, but my mother sat perfectly still as if she didn't hear or believe what was happening to her safe and secure world.

Everyone agreed that Chaim Leib's plan was a good one. I begged to go but was reminded repeatedly that I was too young. "But I have my own shovel and I can dig too," I cried. "Please, Papa, let me come."

"No, Imic. Enough. This is not child's play. Go to bed."

Chaim Leib knelt down and looked me in the eye. "Imic, you have already seen much for such a small boy, and you will see much more before this awful thing has ended. If you want to help with the digging you may come with me, but remember it will be very hard work. We will use only one small candle so the farmers can't see the light from the road."

My father went first. Then my mother and my uncle, carrying me on his shoulders. My father lit a small candle. My mother's face was ashen as she went through the house, marking the things that were to be buried. She had a small piece of marking chalk and put a small "x" on the underside of each object. When at last she had finished, fifty items of value were marked to be buried. Small pieces of antique furniture, all the silver, gold, many pieces of jewelry, and some loose jewels my father had taken in trade, as well as our Persian rugs, which had been in my mother's family for many years.

Piece by piece was taken to the stable and placed in the large cedar chest which my father and uncle brought there. The digging began. I had my shovel and worked for two hours alongside my uncle and father. After we had dug down about ten feet, my arms felt as if they were no longer connected to my body. I acked all over. My mother made tea to revive us. I sat down to have a cup with her and before I knew it my head was on her lap and I was fast asleep. I awoke just as the last shovel of dirt was covering the chest.

Later on, as we all sat drinking tea in the kitchen with my grandparents and cousins, Chaim Leib began to speak again. I watched him and understood why some thought he was different from others in the family. He was tall and lean. His dark eyes were set deep in his head and had black circles under them. They came, people said, from reading and studying with poor light, trying to unlock the secrets of what lay beyond our small isolated world. "We must cast our lot with the Russians," he was saying. "The Rumanians will return and take Bessarabia from the Russians again. We must follow the Russians. We will not be safe with the Rumanians."

"But Chaim," my grandfather interrupted, "King Carol has always dealt fairly with the Jews. Your own brother served in the King's Cavalry, commerce was free, people were happy. Why should we follow the Bolsheviks?"

"Papa," Chaim Leib went on, "Jews really were less than equal with the Rumanians. Oh, we were able to keep our businesses, but we were used and none of us had anything to do with their government. There is a great German force coming, and the Rumanians will go with the Germans. A man named Hitler is in command, and he will see that the Jews are destroyed. Great machines of destruction are being built by German scientists already. Escape routes to America are closing daily."

"Chain," my father said, "I have also heard rumors about this Hitler. But we have heard so many rumors in the past, and Hitler is so far away. We have no control over him. We must worry about providing for our family. Rumania will protect the Jews, not join with Germany."

"Enough," my mother said firmly, stopping the talk. "We must all get to bed--it is very late."

I fell asleep listening to the rain pounding on the windowpane.

THE RAINS CAME

I awoke very early the next morning. The sun was bright through the shutters and made dancing patterns on my blanket. I looked at the sleeping faces of my father and mother and my cousins. The lines caused by worry and fear erased for a short time by peaceful rest.

I crept from my bed and went over to the shutters. My father stirred and saw me and in a loud whisper told me to leave the shutters locked and get back to bed. I waited until I heard his even breathing again. Then I slowly crept down the stairs and silently went through the back door into the garden.

The vegetables growing there looked so delicious, shining in the early morning sun. I gathered up my night shirt, picked plump red tomatoes, shiny green cucumbers, green onions, radishes and rosy pink rhubarb. When I went back into the house, the door accidently slammed behind me. My father was down in the kitchen in an instant. I stood very still, my heart beating with fear. Silently, he took my morning gathering from me, got out the paring knife and began to make a salad.

"Imic," he began, "I know it is very hard for you to understand that you must stay inside and play quietly. None of us knows what will happen in our town, and we are at least safe behind our doors."

"But, Papa," I began to argue, "couldn't we just open the shutters? It's so dark in this house."

"No, Imic, not even the shutters. Now go and wake up your mother, and no more going outside unless you are with me."

The next five days were one blur. The rain came in great curtains and beat day and night on the house and windows. We slept a lot, talked into the darkness and played simple card games by the flicker of the single candle that we dared to burn.

On the fifth day, my parents discussed the growing shortage of food. There were eight of us to feed, since at night we sneaked food to my grandparents. I went with my father every morning to gather the decreasing number of vegetables from our garden. My mother and I went down to the cool cellar to see about the meat supply. We found a very small amount. She took a small package of beef that was really only enough meat for two, but somehow she managed to serve eight.

"Velvel," she said, "we can't go on much longer. The food is running out."

"We still have flour, yeast and meal, so at least we can have bread. The vegetables will last a few more days," my father replied.

When my mother served the meager meal, everyone refused to take more than a spoonful for fear the others would not have enough. I tried very hard to eat very little like the others, but I was really very hungry. When my mother insisted I eat more, I didn't refuse.

The rain went on. The loud drops beat on the windowpanes like rocks thrown by an angry boy. One night I woke up suddenly. There was another sound besides the continuous splashing—voices.

"Quick, Papa, wake up," I nudged him. "Wake up, someone is outside,"

"Shh, Imic, I am awake. I hear them too."

We lay very still and listened. We heard feet moving slowly through the mud, hundreds of footsteps in the deep muddy ruts of our street, just a few hundred feet before our window. Soon a new sound--heavy wheels turning slowly past our house.

By now everyone was awake, jolted out of peace by a new fear. My parents clung to one another and I climbed in the bed with them, not knowing what it was that I was listening to. We lay there for what seemed like hours, until finally my father crept over to the window. He opened the shutter very slowly and looked out. We could hear the sound of a horse neighing and shouting angry voices. "It's a whole army of soldiers," my father whispered to us.

"What are they wearing?" my uncle Chaim Leib wanted to know. "It sounds like they're speaking Rumanian."

"It is the Rumanian Army," my father said weakly. "They're wearing moccasins, not boots like the Germans."

The Rumanians had returned.

The hours passed as we sat huddled in our beds listening to the marching of the Rumanian Army below our window.

When all was finally quiet again, my Uncle Chaim Leib got up and dressed quickly, not saying a word to anyone. He filled a knapsack with the few belongings he had brought to our house. "What are you doing, Chaim?" my father asked.

"I have tried to tell you, my brother, we must follow the Russians. The Rumanians will not help us. They will only make us their prisoners. They are truly our enemy. I am leaving Brichen," he continued. "I am going to join the Russian army."

My grandmother began to sob. "You will be killed, Chaim. You don't even know which direction to go. Please--wait until morning, and then let's talk about it."

"Enough talk, Mother," Chaim Leib said. "I must do what is right for me. It is my only chance. And I must go at night when no one can see me or else you will suffer because of me."

"My son," my grandfather said, "please listen to me. The Rumanians have always been fair to us. I am sure they will continue. You must admit that."

"No, Father, I will not admit that. I'm sure the Rumanians will join the Germans and Hitler. It will become the most destructive army the world will ever see, especially for the Jews. I only wish I could take all of you with me," Chaim Leib said, looking around the room.

My mother was crying silently, her shoulders shaking with sobs.

My father took something from his closet. "For you, Chaim," he said, handing him the shiniest pair of black leather boots I had ever seen.

"Thank you, Velvel," Chaim Leib said. "Someday I will give them back to you, when we are all together again in safety and peace." He softly kissed everyone and dried my mother's tears. "Take care of Imic, Chava. I'll see him again someday." He leaned down to me and pinched my cheek. "Be a brave boy. I'll save your father's boots for you." With that he was gone into the dark rainy night. No one slept. Heavy with tears, the dawn came.

THE BEGINNING

"Now hear this, all Jews come into the street immediately! All Jews leave your houses and come into the street!"

What was that? My whole family was jolted awake by the noise. We ran to the window to see what it was. Again the voice repeated the message. It was coming from a truck with a speaker on top, driving slowly down our street.

"All Jews leave your houses and come into the street!" Again and again the message was repeated.

People cautiously began to go into the street. We quickly threw on coats over our night clothes and joined our neighbors outside. It had all happened so quickly that none of us said a word to each other. For the first day in seven, the sun was shining.

And then a second truck came down the street. "All Jews must report to the Soccer Stadium at two p.m. Bring enough clothes and food for two days. Any Jew not reporting will be shot."

I looked at the faces of my family and our friends. They showed much more than fear this morning. My mother's face was completely drained of color. She was squeezing my hand so tightly my fingers were numb.

Things happened fast after that. My father went into town and bought as much food as we could carry. My mother, grandmother and aunts packed clothes in knapsacks that we would carry on our backs. My grandfather nailed the windows and doors shut so that no one could get in our house while we were gone.

I lay down on my bed for the last time and fell fast asleep. I awoke with my mother shaking me, telling me to get us and get the knapsack she had packed for me. I looked around the room with tears in my eyes, silently saying goodbye to everything I had treasured.

At around 1:30 father locked our front door and kissed the Mezuzah as he passed through the doorway, the tears running down his cheeks. We went into the street to start our walk to the soccer stadium. We joined what seemed like thousands. All Jews were walking toward the stadium, the pious Jews with their long black caftans and tall black hats covering their white-skinned heads, walking with the businessmen, lawyers, bankers; everyone we knew was there. Some were wearing knapsacks, others carrying suitcases and brown bags of food. People were saying all kinds of things about what would happen to us. Some thought we would all go to another country, others that the Rumanians were leaving Brichen and wanted to tell us about it. Wild rumors began to grow.

As soon as we arrived on the soccer field, three truckloads of soldiers with guns and drawn bayonets arrived. The noise of the crowd was so loud I put my hands over my ears and began to cry. My father picked me up and held me very tightly until I stopped.

A soldier stepped down from the truck, took out his pistol and fired two shots quickly into the air. Then all was quiet. Only the sounds of breathing and a baby crying here and there. I could hear my heart pounding. The soldier began to speak into a large tube that made his voice very loud.

"This is an official edict of his Majesty, King Carol. All Jews are a threat to this country and all Jews in Bessarabia are to be relocated." A stir went through the crowd. "Silence!" the soldier shouted. "This is not a joke! The following fifteen men are to step forward and get into this truck." He read the names of our Rabbi, doctors, lawyers, our banker and other important men in the community. They moved forward slowly and got into the truck, which then went out the stadium gate. What seemed like seconds later we heard many gunshots fired very fast.

"Oh, my God," my father shouted, "they've been killed! All of them!"

The families of the executed men were screaming and women were fainting. A loud cry rose up from the crowd.

The officer raised his hand and twenty rifle shots exploded in the air. In the whimpering quiet, he spoke again. "From now on, you will march six abreast. Anyone falling out of line will be shot. You will march all day and rest at night until we have reached our destination."

My father continued to hold me. My mother, grandparents and two of my aunts formed a line, and we began to march, with the others, out of the soccer stadium. No one dared speak, everyone just walked. The silent line looked like a great snake making its way across the field. At the very front there was an open truck with a soldier pointing his gun at us, and at the end, another truck and gun aimed at us.

The other rabbi in our town was in the line just in front of us. He tripped on a stone, lost his balance and fell. He was shot immediately. Hundreds passed by and stepped silently over his body on the ground.

"I want to go home, Papa," I said faintly. "I'm scared."

"So am I, Imic, so am I," my father replied.

As we marched we saw the peasants waiting with their wagons along the roadside. My mother said they would go to the Jews' houses and steal anything valuable, now that we were gone.

I finally fell asleep on my father's shoulder.

THE DRIVE

The days became a blue, one after another. We marched all day until the night came. I watched the ghostly procession, those who were left, proceed across the open fields, still six abreast. I saw people throw away suitcases, knapsacks, sewing machines, books, anything too heavy to carry, to be scooped up by the farmers who lined the fields, waiting like vultures. As dusk fell, the soldiers herded us, like cows, into a nearby field. I was very hungry. We had eaten most of the food we brought with us and shared some with otehrs who had not brought enough.

I lay there on the field, with a knapsack for my pillow, looking up at the dark sky and a bright moon. The sounds of the people all around us began to die down, and in the distance I could hear dogs barking and baying at the moon. As the evening passed into the night, a weird hush fell over our group. Moans and cries were still heard, but they were quickly stilled.

The wind began to blow and I got very cold. Out of nowhere, clouds appeared and the wind became stronger. A drop fell on my nose; it was raining. Familied huddled together, putting whatever coats they had over their heads. But it did no good. The heavy rain drenched every man, woman and child to the bone. There was not a dry soul among us. Tired and weary, wet and hungry, dirty with mud caked all over our bodies, we fell asleep to await morning.

As darkness turned to dawn, there was a stirring and moving. Suddenly screams were heard everywhere—the yells and cries of men and women who had found their parents or children lying dead beside them. Abruptly the word dame: "Move onto the road!" The cries stopped. Everyone picked up what he could carry, some leaving half their belonging behind, moving onto the road where once again we went on with our march. There were fewer of us now.

The days passed. We continued to march all day and fell into some kind of sleep at night. We had been on the road for about a week. Many of the people who started out with us had died. The old and the sick fell to the side. In the back of the lines, many miles back, I could hear occasional shots. I knew those lying on the side of the road would never join the line again.

Sometimes I walked, but because my legs were short and I was slow, most of the time I rode on my father's shoulders. I knew he was very tired, but somehow he managed to carry me.

One morning when we started out again, we could see a town in the distance. "Look, Papa," I said, "maybe that's where they're taking us."

My father looked. "No, Imic, that is Tzicoron. We've been here for the soccer matches when you were much younger."

When we were close to the soccer stadium, the Rumanian guards ordered us to stop and sit down. We heard another sound then, a screeching voice on a loudspeaker, far away, coming from the direction of the soccer stadium. We could not hear the words, only the sounds. Soon we heard the same twenty shots we had heard a few days before. And then we saw them.

The people were filing out of the stadium, six abreast, and it was like seeing yourself in a giant mirror. As the first group reached us I saw a look of fear and desperation in their eyes. To them we must have looked like death--wet, covered with mud, clothes torn and shoes without soles--a ragged lot sitting on the side of the road waiting--for what, no one knew. Our two groups came together and we were ordered to get up and begin walking again.

I looked at my mother. She was clutching a piece of paper in her hand and her face had a new look on it, one of hate, anger and determination. She began to walk more slowly and fell behind us. I grabbed her hand. "Mama, come on. You'll get shot if you don't walk faster. Hurry up. Please don't get behind."

"Sh, sh, Imic, I must see about your Aunt Pearl. Rachel passed me a note that she is sick. You stay with Papa and keep walking. Don't worry about me," she said, and fell back into the line. I walked on, terrified for my mother. My father held my hand tightly as if to give me some of his strength.

We passed by other towns, never going through them, always around. The Jews of Lipcon and Yedenitz joined our line as the Jews of Tzicoron had done. Our line was very long now. I looked back. As far as I could see, I saw people--hungry, scared people continuing to march, afraid of the soldiers. I kept looking for my mother. Would I ever see her again?

I lay down beside my father that night and tried to keep the tears from coming. He put his hand on my cheek and said, "That's all right, Imic, even brave boys have to cry sometimes."

THE CANTEEN

She slowly came to as my father wiped the blood from her forehead with a piece of cloth torn from his shirt. Her face was white and her eyebrows looked thick and black. She couldn't speak. She looked up at the faces around her as if she knew no one.

Later, when the shock wore off, the cuts on her forehead became very painful. She moved her hand to the small of her back and tried to show us there was pain there also. Slowly the doctor turned her over. He found blood spots dried on her torn blouse. He took a cloth and began to remove the dried blood from the wound, slowly peeling it off. He had no water to make it easier. I heard my mother's screams of pain. My father held her hand and caressed her black hair all the while assuring her, through his own tears, that all would be well.

My feelings of terror mounted. I ran frantically from one aunt to another, pulling on their skirts. "What's the matter with my mama? Why is she crying and so bloody? Please tell me."

Finally, my Aunt Rachel, the oldest of the family, took me aside. "Imic, all this happened because your mama wanted a drink of water. She dropped back in the line because she had heard your Aunt Pearl was sick. As she was looking for Pearl, she saw a German soldier's canteen lying on the ground not far from the line. There were no Rumanian guards there, so she ran out of the line and grabbed it. Oh, what a treasure to have a canteen, and what a brave mama you have, Imic—always remember that. Your mama saw a deserted farmhouse with a well in front of it. She rushed over to the well and filled the canteen. In her joy, she didn't see the four Rumanian soldiers approaching her with their rifles pointed at her head. When she heard them, she quickly put the canteen under her apron. They shouted at her and began to beat her with their rifle butts and with the leather straps from their guns. When she was unconscious they left her, sure that she was dead."

"But Aunt Rachel, why didn't they shoot her?" I asked.

"The soldiers have many more people to kill before this was is over," she answered, "they didn't want to waste a bullet." She went on. "Your mother lay there bleeding for a long time until your Aunt Pearl, who was three miles back, spotted her crawling toward the line. Pearl and your uncle picked her up and carried her the rest of the way, and that is the end of the story--not a very pretty story for a little boy to hear, but you will hear and see worse, my little Imic, in the days to come."

I went back to my mama. She had stopped crying. I put my mouth to her ear and whispered, "Mama, where's the canteen now?" She smiled a weak smile and patted her stomach. Then she slept.

POINT OF DISTRIBUTION

Early the next morning my father and his brother found two boards which they tied together and covered with burlap sacks that they found on the road. On this they placed my mother. I walked alongside the stretcher, hardly daring to look at her face. Once I did and saw her eyes open and dazed. I thought she must be dead. I put my hand on her arm. When I saw a faint smile appear on her face I knew she would get well.

We hadn't marched very far that day when we were ordered to stop as we approached a bombed-out town. No one recognized the ruins. We didn't know where we were. In the center of the town there were several bombed houses completely encircled by a barbed wire fence. We were ordered to enter the area.

There were about twenty-five thousand people left. Many had died. No one knew how many.

My father began running to a bombed-out building that still had a roof over one room. We followed and crowded into the one room as if it were a golden castle filled with jewels. This was to be our home for many weeks.

Our barbed-wire prison became filled with daily horror. The grounds inside the fence were covered with human excrement. The stink was terrible. We were given only stale bread and unclean water to eat and drink. There were no medical supplies. Many died from disease and starvation.

The farmers came to barter. Standing outside the barbed wire, they offered food for a price, a sack of meal for a fur coat, a loaf of bread for a diamond necklace. We were all hungry. But there was nothing we could do. We had no money. The only thing of value we had was the diamond necklace my father had given my mother on their wedding day. She had hidden it under her clothes.

Because at least she had rested, my mother felt much better. Every day she went to the fence to listen to the farmers offering food. A Greek Orthodox priest one day offered my mother 800 lei for the necklace. She came back to our room very excited. "Eight hundred lei! I can buy two sacks of cornmeal and a gallon of milk and we can have bread to eat."

"But Chava," my grandmother advised, "your diamonds are worth four times that. Don't sell them, please. We will survive."

"I have already decided," my mother announced. "We will have fresh bread to eat."

The next morning, very early, my mother went to the fence to meet the priest. She was to make the trade and then go to the side where the farmers tood and get the meal and milk. We waited patiently for her to return. Suddenly we heard her scream. She came running into the room and began to cry hysterically. She kept screaming and beating her fists on the ground. Finally my father stopped her. We heard the story.

When my mother went to the fence to buy the much-awaited food, she learned that the lei was no longer used. The currency had been changed eight days before. The lei was worthless. We wondered if the priest had enjoyed cheating the Jew. And once again we went to sleep hungry.

The next morning names were called over the loudspeaker. People were leaving the camp. Groups of two thousand each were being moved to different places. We tried not to think where they sent the old and sick. Others went back to the road and began to march again, six abreast.

Where would we go now?

THE TURNOVER

"Put that brick here, Sarah," I said to my new playmate. "That will finish our house." Sarah Jacobs and I had been building our play house out of old bricks from the bombed-out buildings. We hadn't known each other before, but now we had become good friends. She and her family had marched in the line in front of us and stayed in our room with the roof.

"Imic," she said, "let's get more bricks. We can make a bigger house. I saw some yesterday over by the fence."

"All right," I began, but suddenly I stopped. Trucks with soldiers and shiny rifles and machine guns were riding into the camp. I grabbed Sarah's hand and ran to our shelter. Our parents were waiting for us.

"Come, Imic," my mother said, "it is time for us to go. They have told us to move out."

"Where will we go, Mama?" I cried. "I don't want to walk on the road again."

"We will do as they say, Imic, or we will be shot," my father said. "Let's go."

We moved out of the gate onto the road. Marching again, six abreast. No one talked or asked where we were going. Like lifeless puppets, we followed those who held the strings--or the guns.

"Mama," I tugged at her hand, "where are we going? When will we stop? Please tell me where we are," I demanded.

"Imic, Imic, I do not know where we are and I do not know where we're going. We must keep walking."

It was about 2:00 o'clock when I saw the brightly decorated big wagon. "Look, Sarah, a circus wagon," I squealed excitedly.

"Now hear this," a loud voice boomed from the wagon, "because of the kindness and generosity of the glorious Rumanian Army the children of the Jews will be carried in the wagon and will no longer be required to walk. As the wagon passes, put your children on the back."

"Oh, Mama, Papa, I get to ride in the circus wagon," I said joyfull. "Sarah, let's get on the wagon, come on." I broke into a run. My father grabbed me by the back of the neck.

"No, Imic," he shouted. Why was he shouting? "You will walk with us. We will not be seaparated. We will stay together."

"Velvel, let him go," my mother pleaded. "He's so young and so tired, let him ride in the wagon."

"We're going to let Sarah ride," Mr. Jacobs added. "Let the boy ride."

"No," my father said angrily. "He will walk."

The wagon slowed as it came to us. The Jacobs' helped Sarah get on.

"How about the little one with the golden curls?" the man driving the wagon said, pointing at me.

"He will walk," my father announced.

"Little ones get tired easily," the man continued with a smile. "We have much farther to go today. Better let him ride with me and rest his little feet."

"Please, Papa," I said meekly.

"He will walk," my father repeated.

The man shook his head and slowly moved on to the next family to pick up their children.

I watched for a long time. It seemed like hundreds of laughing children happily climbed into the circus wagon, their parents helping them. I continued to look longingly at the wagon until it was completely out of sight. I did not mention it again and neither did my father. We kept on walking.

The sun was going down and dark clouds were filling the sky. We usually stopped at nightfall, but we were not given the order even though it was getting very dark. We had no lights to see our way, there was no moon, and yet we kept on walking.

My grandfather picked me up and carried me for a long time. I was very sleepy and dozed in his arms as we walked. Hours passed and still we walked. We had not rested since early morning. Many people fell to the side of the road weak with hunger and exhaustion. They were left to die. "Grandfather," I said, "when will we stop?"

"Shh, Imic," he said, "just close your eyes and try to sleep. I will take care of you."

I had drifted again into a half sleep when I heard a strange noise. Every time my grandfather took a step I heard the noise. It sounded like sticks being broken. "What is that noise, Grandfather?" I asked. "I hear it when you walk."

Suddenly hysterical screams and animal-like sounds rocked through the crowd. The moon had come from behind the clouds. I looked at the ground and began to scream too.

"It's the children!"

We were walking across a field of dead children.

All of them had been killed by the wagon driver's bullets.

The screams and cries grew louder. Mothers and fathers saw their children's dead bodies under their feet. The same children who only hours before they had helped climb on the wagon.

"I wanted to go on the wagon too. I wanted to go on the wagon too!"

I kept saying this over and over, screaming, until finally my grandfather slapped me across the face. I was quiet then.

I looked down one more time. I saw her. It was Sarah. My little playmate, beautiful dark-eyed Sarah.

"I hate them," I screamed. "I hate the stinking Rumanians. I'll kill them!"

"Imic," my father said sternly, "there is nothing we can do now. We must always stay together and not cause any trouble. Be quite now."

We came out of the field and were told to stop. We fell to the ground. The night was horror.

The next morning we were back on the road, marching, always marching. We came to a bridge. "Velvel, this is the Dniester River," my mother said. "I saw a sign. We are on our way to the Ukraine."

"You will halt here," a voice on a loudspeaker announced. "The great German Army, supreme ally of the glorious Rumanian Army, is now in command. You will follow orders or be shot. You will march to the next dity and there receive further orders."

"The Germans," my father whispered. "What will become of us now ?"

OUR DESTINATION

Days began, days ended. We walked on and on to some faraway destiny--no one knew where and no one really cared anymore.

Our number was few now. We no longer marched six abreast. Some said that over half of our people had died or been shot.

The Germans gave us no food. We groveled in the fields for sugar beets or roots we could eat, and drank from puddles along the road.

The skies were always gray and the rain came almost every day. The summer had passed and the weather was getting cold. Our clothes were torn and ragged. None of us had shoes to wear.

Several weeks passed ans still we walked. Finally I couldn't walk any more. I was so weak that I stumbled each time I moved more than five steps. I felt very dizzy and burning up inside, yet I was so chilled that even my father's coat could not get me warm. My mother said that I had a high fever, and she tried to cool me with water from the puddles on the road. She tore a piece of cloth from her skirt and wrapped it around my head. Each day I got worse until finally I could no longer hold my head up. My father had to carry me.

For five days I was unconscious most of the time. Then my father could no longer hold my weight. Weak from no food and carrying me all those days, he too had become ill.

That night, as we lay in the field, I ~~was~~ faintly heard my mother and father talking about me.

"We must leave him, Velvel," my mother said. "You can no longer carry him. He is very ill and cannot go on."

"I will not leave my only child on the road—here he will die for sure," my father replied.

"You both will die," my mother continued, "if we take him. You must understand that it is better this way."

"No, Chava, enough." My father was shouting now. "I won't leave him. We will all go together and somehow God will give me the strength to carry our son."

My mother began to sob, loud hysterical sobs that seemed to say that all was lost and we would all die soon. She cried for a long, long time until finally all was quiet. My father began to moan as if in great pain, but soon he lay very still. I was sure he was dead. He was lying beside me and when I touched him he felt hot; he had the fever too.

When morning came, my father couldn't stand. My mother tried to hold him up but he kept falling. "Come on, Velvel, we have to leave," she was shouting in the air.

"I will not leave Imic," my father whispered. "I will stay here with my son." He lay down beside me. My mother looked down at us slowly, with tears in her eyes, began to walk in the direction of the others.

I began to sob. When there were no more tears left, I fell asleep. When I awoke it was very dark, and I could hear my father's uneven breathing at my side. "Papa, Papa, are you alive?" I asked, touching his face.

"Yes, Imic, I am alive. Try to sleep," he said.

"But Mam's gone. We will never see her again, we will die here. Why did she leave us? I want to see Mama," I began to cry. My father didn't answer me. He put his big hand over mine and I fell asleep again.

I awoke with a start; I thought I must be dreaming. There above me, in a vision, was my mother's face, smiling at me. "Mama, Mama! Is it you?"

"Yes, Imic, I have come back. The place they are taking us is just a short distance from here, maybe two hours away," she said.

"Oh, Chava," my father said, "you are here! You did return."

My mother had brought back a loaf of bread. We ate the bread and drank water from a canteen she had with her. Neither Papa nor I dared ask where she got the bread and water. We both knew she must have risked her life for it.

"How did you come back?" my father asked.

"The guards were sleeping when I left and the new guards don't come on until 3:00. I heard them talking. I left as soon as I saw them go to sleep. If we hurry we can get back before anyone knows I've gone. Please, we must hurry," she said.

I was still very weak and sick, but I knew I had to do it. At least I wouldn't die on the road. My father was stronger now and somehow we both managed to stumble along the road, both of us holding onto my mother. None of us spoke again until we had reached our destination. "Where are we, Mama?" I broke the silence.

"I don't know, Imic. The Germans said this is as far as we go and that we will stay here until further notice."

I looked around to see huts that pigs had once lived. This was our destination.

BROKEN GLASS

There were ten of us in the little stall once used for pigs, but I was glad we didn't have to walk anymore. My grandparents, my mother, father and I and five other people were told that this is where we were to stay. They called this place Sumewka. My father told me Sumewka was a small town in the Ukraine where most of the wheat for the whole world was grown in that country. We were here to harvest the wheat.

We were given one blanket for each family so between my grandparents and my parents we had two blankets. The Germans laid straw over the frozen ground for us to sleep on. There were no toilets, no water to wash with, nor was there any real food, only a cup of gruel a day with an occasional slice of bread.

We all fell onto the straw that first day completely exhausted, only to hear the announcement, "All men, women and children will report to the front guard to go to the fields." I tried to go with the others, but I couldn't walk--my legs wouldn't move.

"Imic," my mother cried, "come on, let's go."

"I can't walk, Mama," I cried in pain. "I can't move my legs."

"The guards will shoot you if you disobey the order," she said.

Just then the guard came to our stall. With the butt of his rifle he jabbed at my mother and father to move them out. "And you," he said to me, "what's wrong with you? Are you too good to work the fields?"

Shaking with fear I answered, "I cannot walk, sir. My legs will not move. Tomorrow I will be all right."

He looked at me a long time and then kicked my leg with the toe of his boot. I screamed in pain. "Tomorrow you will join the others." He moved away.

The guard did not come back and for days I lay on the filthy straw unable to walk. I was thin and weak from hunger. My mother and father bound their feet with straw each morning before they left to go to the fields. Each evening when they returned their feet would be bloody from the cold.

My grandfather had been getting weaker every day. One day he couldn't move at all. My parents and grandmother hid him under the straw in case the guards came by during the morning. I pushed some straw over me and covered us both with a blanket. I heard steps outside and voices. "You see, the boy has gone to the fields. I knew he would. Everyone here follows my orders. Let's move on," and then they walked away.

We lay that way for the rest of the day, not daring to move. I could feel the skin of my grandfather hot with fever. He would die soon. With him would go the happy times. I could remember his loud booming laugh and the games we played when I stayed at his house. For the first time, I knew he really would die.

That night we awoke to loud noises, like the popping of corks. Then we heard the shatter of broken glass. All the windows were being broken. My grandfather, delirious from the fever, stood up and tried to stuff hay in the broken panes to keep the wind out. Then he seemed to melt to the ground. He was dead. I reached out to touch the lifeless old man, but I drew my hand away and closed my eyes. Silently the tears rolled down my cheeks onto the dirty straw.

MOURNER'S KADDISH

"Yis-ga dal V'Yis--sh' may ra-bo, B'ol-mo do--v'ro hir-u-say, v'yam-leeh, mal-hu-say."

My father was saying the Kaddish. I looked at my grandfather, still lying on the straw, and he looked as if he were asleep. My mother was sitting very still next to my father, the tears rolling from her cheeks to the straw. My grandmother looked straight ahead at the broken windows. I moved closer to her and tried to touch her hand. Her expression didn't change. She kept staring as if she weren't really seeing. She did not touch me or give me her hand in return. I became very frightened. For the three hours since my grandfather's death she had not moved at all. Sitting and staring, not one word had she spoken.

"O'Se Shalom bim Ro-mav hu ya-se sha-lom O,-lay nu V'al col Yis-rael V'im-ru--Amayn."

The Kaddish was over. My father began to cry softly. I could feel myself beginning to cry too. He silently took me in his arms and held me for the rest of the night. I was wet from his tears, but at last I felt less frightened and was able to sleep.

The next morning all of us, almost frozen, woke to find that the snow had fallen all night and was still falling. The drifts were almost up to our window.

"We can't go out and bury him now," I heard my father say to my uncle and mother. "Not in this snow. We will be covered in no time, and die ourselves."

"But, by our law, he must be buried," my uncle answered.

"We will wait," my father replied. "God would not want us to die trying to bury him." The discussion was ended abruptly by the loudspeaker.

"All men, women and children who have been assigned to work the fields report immediately to the gate!"

"Please, Mama, Papa, don't leave me here alone," I cried in hysteria. I looked at my grandmother. She was still sitting, unblinking, staring at the window as if something was holding her eyes there. "Grandfather's dead and grandmother will die soon. Please don't leave me."

"I will go, Velvel. You stay with Imic," my mother said.

"No, Chava--we will both stay."

My uncle settled the argument. "I'll say that you are both sick." My uncle was gone just a short time. He returned completely covered with snow. "The work has been called off today. The snow is too deep. No one knew you weren't there."

All day long we sat, hungry and cold, with my grandfather's body there to remind us of death, and my grandmother still not moving. Night came again and it was still snowing. The snow was packed against the window and still getting higher. We had stuffed straw in the broken panes and the snow was now not letting the cold air in.

Before I went to sleep I moved close to my grandmother and whispered in her ear, "Goodnight, Grandmother, I love you." I thought I saw a twinkle in her eyes, but I will never know. When I awoke the next morning, she was dead. Still sitting, still staring, but now not breathing. I began to cry and scream at the walls, the straw, the whole world. "I told you she would die! My grandmother is dead!"

My father slapped me hard across the face. I stopped screaming and he held me close and began to cry softly. My mother got up and went to my grandmother, closed her eyes and laid her down next to my grandfather. My mother began to say the Kaddish because my father was holding me and crying. My uncle just put his head down on the straw and sobbed, great shaking silent sobs.

At last my father put me down. "We will bury them side by side today." He stood up and pulled my uncle up and they wrapped their feet with straw. When he opened the door, the snow was almost to the top. Slowly they dug their way out. Late in the afternoon they came back. Digging through the snow until they reached the dirt and then digging down into the dirt had taken all day. My father's hands were bloody and blue. My uncle had cuts and blood all over his hands too. They had no shovels or tools, only their fingers. My mother silently wrapped our blanket around their hands. I put all the straw around me on their cold feet.

My mother reached inside a dirty brown sack and found some bread that she had gotten from a farmer before the snow. We all ate a little, and then my father said, "We don't have time to sit here. It will be dark soon and the snow has stopped, but it may start again. We must take them out and bury them now."

My mother began dragging my grandmother across the straw to the door. I couldn't watch at first. I buried my head in the straw. Then I saw my father pick up my grandfather and my uncle pick up my grandmother, and they carried them through the path in the snow to the newly dug grave. "Come, Chava, we will have the funeral now," my father said in a voice I had not heard for a long time. He sounded very strong.

"I must come too," I said.

"No, Imic, you are sick and cannot walk," my mother said.

"I must come," I said loudly. My mother gave in and picked me up and carried me in her arms through the snow.

The burial ground was a few hundred yards behind our stall. As we approached the grave, we saw a man standing on the other side of the fence about a quarter of a mile away. "It's him," my father said as he lowered my grandfather into the grave. "I have heard that he gets money from the Germans for stealing the gold from dead Jews' teeth. He is a Jew himself. He comes from a nearby camp and waits for burials. He must have seen us dig the grave," my father said, fear in his voice.

"He has on a heavy coat, a warm hat and he looks like he isn't hungry," I said to my mother. "If he is Jewish why isn't he like us?"

"Sh, Imic, I can't explain to you now why some people are good and other people are bad. Someday you will understand," my mother answered.

My father and uncle began to cover the bodies with dirt and snow and I could see tears falling from their eyes and making little holes in the snow. My mother was crying. My father said a prayer and asked God to take care of what was left of his family, and then we began to walk back to our stall.

My father and uncle stopped and looked back when they got to the corner of the building. They saw the man climbing the fence and running toward the newly covered grave. He had a pair of pliers in his hand. My father and uncle ran toward him. Just as he uncovered my grandmother's head and was trying to open her jaws, they reached him. There was a terrible fight. My father was screaming and hitting the man with his fists. He dropped the pliers. My uncle picked them up and began beating him over and over until the man lay on the ground not moving at all.

My father and uncle ran back into the stall, and we all sat down, too afraid to speak. Someone would find the man and know my uncle and father had beat him up, and then they would be killed. I looked out the door and saw that once again it was snowing--big flakes, falling faster and faster and covering everything on the ground. "Papa," I said, "it's snowing again. No one will ever get the gold teeth now and no one will know what happened to the bad man outside." It snowed all night and for another two days.

DELIRIUM

My days and nights on the filthy straw began to be the same to me. I was burning on the inside and freezing on the outside. My mother covered me with both our blankets, but still I shivered, and then I would throw off the blankets and sweat. Faces became blurry. I could hear voices in the distance, but the words were all jumbled. I would try very hard to focus my eyes on the people in our stall, but I was so tired--so very tired. I had terrible dreams--bears and tigers and scary devils would be crawling all over me, on my head and on top of my blankets, and they would pick me up and drop again and I would cry and cry for them to stop. The scary devil would hit me on the head and poke out my eyes with his long pointed fingernails.

Many days passed and finally I heard a voice closeby. I tried to listen and concentrate on each word. The voice was not familiar to me, but the words were Yiddish so I was not afraid. "Imic, can you hear me?" the voice said. I tried to speak but no words would come. I tried to nod my head, but I had no control over the movement.

I opened my eyes and saw the blurred face of a man--I had seen him, before, a long time ago when I first came to this place. "Imic, this is your mother. I am right beside you. Dr. Abramowitz is here to see you." I knew who the voice belonged to--our old friend, the doctor. He was the doctor in our town a long time ago. He was here to help me. "Make the tigers go away, please," I said or I tried to say to the voice beside me.

"Eat this, Imic," my mother's voice said. "Eat this onion. The doctor says your fever will go away if you eat onions." I felt something being pushed into my mouth. It smelled and tasted terrible. I moved my head to get away from it, but it kept coming back to my mouth. At last I tasted the onion and my whole mouth began to burn. My tongue was on fire. Then water came and was put into my mouth from a hand. I couldn't see a body or an arm on that hand, only fingers holding a cup.

Every day for days I would have an onion pushed into my mouth. Voices, from far away, kept saying, "Eat this, drink this." I heard voices crying, sobbing, screaming.

Could I be dead? Where was I? Whose voices were these, whose cries, whose screams? Where was my father? Where were all the people who loved me? Why was I all alone with screaming, crying animals?

Something cold was touching my face. It felt so good, like ice cream, falling on my face. Someone was carrying me. I was floating high above the ground on a boat, floating in the sky. It was very dark, but I didn't fear the voices anymore, just floating in the dark cold sky.

At last I stopped floating. The voices I heard I could understand. I was not hot or cold, but just right. My fingers touched something soft. It felt like silk. My head was back on my body and my arms and legs were mine again.

I opened my eyes and began to look around me. Where am I, I wondered. I was lying in a bed, not straw, with clean white sheets and a warm blanket that was soft. My head was on a goosefeather pillow. The room was very small with just one window, but the window was not broken and stuffed with straw. There were curtains at the window, very old with holes in them, but they were clean. The sun was shining in the window and making beautiful designs on the blanket.

The voices continued outside the window. I listened. "Poor Imic. Will he ever be well again? Such a fever he had. For almost three weeks he has been sick and he did not even know we brought him here." The voice was so familiar, a woman's voice--not my mother's or my aunt's--but it sounded like someone I knew.

I looked out of the window and recognized my other grandmother, Chaika. What was she doing there? Where was I? Where are mama and papa? I called loudly for my grandmother. In a few seconds she was standing by my bed, tears streaming from her eyes. "Oh, Imic, you're awake, you are well. God has taken care of you." She began to sob.

My grandfather came running into the room. "Grandfather, why am I here? Where are my mother and father?"

My grandfather said, "Imic, you have been very, very sick. Everyone thought you would die. You had a high fever and were delirious for days. When the Germans found out that I knew how to make wagon wheels they brought me here to make them for the army. I told them you were dying, that you were my only grandchild and that I wanted you with me. They allowed your grandmother and me to carry you here to stay with us. We had to take you at night because the guards didn't want anyone to see. I held your arms and your grandmother held your feet--the doctor told us we could catch your fever if we held you too close. It was snowing and snow was all over your face. Now you are well and the fever is gone, and soon you will be strong enough to walk." My grandfather put his hand to my face and smoothed my hair. "Try to rest," he continued. "I must get back to the wheels."

"Imic," my grandmother said, "I have fixed you some hot onion soup. Drink this and you will feel much better."

"No, Grandmother, not onion soup. I hate onions. Couldn't I just have some warm milk to drink?"

"You're getting better, Imic," she said. "You always did know exactly what you wanted and what you didn't."

For the first time in a long, long time, I felt safe.

THE WAGONMAKER

"Grandmother, Grandmother," I yelled loudly, "come in here." My grandmother came running into my room, wiping her hands on her apron.

"What is it, Imic—a bad dream?"

I wailed and pointed to the large mirror high on the wall opposite my bed. "Who is that in the mirror?"

"It's you, Imic," she anwered. "You are seeing yourself in the mirror."

"It can't be me, I don't look like that. That boy has no hair and his eyes are sunken with big black circles all around, and look at his neck and arms, there is no fat at all, only bones."

I felt my head frantically and discovered that I really did not have any hair left. I looked slowly at my arms—they were only bones. I began to cry.

"Imic, you have been so sick and have not had enough to eat for a long time. Your beautiful curls had to be shaven off when you were sick because your head was full of lice and there was no other way to get rid of them. The high fever made the dark circles around your eyes. But now you're here with us. Your hair will grow back soon and the right food and lots of rest will make you strong and healthy and look good again," she said.

Each day my grandmother would bring me a tray with my breakfast on it and she would feed me because I couldn't sit up yet. She would stay and talk to me about all the good times we had before we left home and all the good times we would have again someday. I loved those stories, and asked her to tell them to me over and over.

"Grandmother, please tell me the story again about how I came here with you and grandfather," I begged. She would tell the tale once more.

"A long time ago in Brichen, there was a young boy named Yankel Leibowitz. He was an orphan and he lived along with his old uncle. Yankel used to come to your grandfather's clothing store and just stand around asking questions and listening to your grandfather's stories. Everyone in the town made fun of Yankel because he was not very smart and couldn't to to school, and he wore funny clothes. But your grandfather was always nice to him. He used to bring him to our home for Shabbos dinner and then Yankel would spend the night and go to shul with your grandfather on Shabbos morning. Your grandfather taught Yankel to read and write and got him an apprenticeship with Jacob Shusterman, the wagon-wheel maker. Yankel worked very hard and he became a very fine apprentice. When all the Jews had to leave Brichen, he came to your grandfather and told him someday he would pay him back for all of his kindness. We didn't see Yankel for a long time after we left Brichen. Your grandfather thought he had probably died somewhere along the road. But when we reached the camp we saw Yankel again. He was very sick and almost dead, but somehow he managed to live, like we did. One day the Germans called the men together and asked if anyone knew how to make wagons and wagon wheels. Out of the whole group only one man spoke up--Yankel. 'I am a wagon-wheel maker, but there is a man here who knows more than I do. He taught me everything I know.' He pointed to your grandfather.

The Germans told your grandfather to get his belongings and pick twenty men to work with him. He and Yankel would be in charge of making wagons. Your grandfather refused to go unless we could take you with us. The Germans needed wagons so badly, they agreed. That is the story of why we are here," she finished with a sigh.

"But Grandmother, grandfather didn't really know how to make wagons, did he?" I asked.

"Of course not, but your grandfather had to take that chance so that you would not die. Your grandfather is a very wise man and he learned quickly from Yankel just as Yankel learned from Mr. Shusterman many years ago. Enough stories, Imic. You must rest now," she said. She fluffed my pillow, kissed my cheek gently and went out.

My grandfather worked every day outside in the shop with twenty men making wagon wheels and wagons for the Germans. The men would come from our camp to work, and then return to the damp at the end of the day.

I lay very still in the little room and looked out the window into the yard where my grandfather and the men were busily hammering and pounding on the metal. I wanted to go out there and watch them. Maybe I could just walk over to the window and wave to my grandfather.

I pulled the covers off and tried to swing my legs down from the bed to the floor. Nothing happened. I tried again. This time I got my feet on the floor, but when I tried to stand, my whole body crumpled to the floor and I screamed in pain.

"Imic, what is it?" my grandmother said as she ran to me. She picked me up and put me back on the bed.

"Oh, Grandmother, I can't walk. Will I ever be able to walk, Grandmother?" I sobbed.

"Of course, Imic," she replied. "You will walk again, but you are not yet strong enough. As soon as you are able, I will take you outside so that you may be with your grandfather. But now you must stay in bed. When the snow thaws and spring comes, we will go outside every day. I promise you that."

Until now I didn't even know that it was still winter and there was snow on the ground because grandmother kept the big oven on all the time and the little house was so warm. As I thought about the snow, I began to feel very sad. I wanted my parents. I had not seen them for a long time. My grandmother never spoke of them. Maybe they were dead.

"Grandmother," I said quietly, "are my mother and father dead?"

"Oh, Imic, of course not. Why would you ask such a thing?" she asked.

"You never mention them to me. Can't they come to see me?" I asked.

"I'm afraid it would be much too dangerous for them to try to leave the camp. They are happy knowing that you are alive and getting well. Yankel takes them a message every day about you."

"Could he take them a message from me?"

"Yes, I suppose he could, Imic. What do you want to tell them?"

"Tell them both that I love them and miss them very much, and the next time they see me I will be able to walk," I said.

"I will tell him, Imic," she said softly.

I closed my eyes and began to dream of the day my mother and father would come and I would run down the path to meet them.

THE NIGHT OF TERROR

Each day Yankel would come to the shop with a message from my parents so I knew they were alive. Many weeks passed and one morning Yankel ran into my room very excitedly with my grandmother right behind him. "They're coming, Imic," he said. "Your parents are coming tomorrow night to see you. Your father said they will get through the fence at night and will come here through the woods."

I was so excited I began to shout. "I will walk for them. I will meet them on the road. I know I can do it."

"Wait, Imic," said my grandmother. "You have not yet walked a step. You cannot walk to the road and meet your parents. We will practice walking to the door of your room--that will be enough." Yankel wished me luch and left the room.

Carefully my grandmother helped me out of the bed and held my arm as I stood on the floor. I cautiously put one foot in front and stepped on it and then the other foot. "Grandmother," I shouted, "I walked, I took a step." It had been weeks, months since I had walked. My knees began to shake after about six steps and grandmother lifted me up and put me back in my bed.

"Grandmother," I said weakly, "I tink the door to my room is far enough to walk, don't you?"

"It certainly is, Imic," she beamed.

Throughout the day I could hear my grandmother singing as she worked. I lay in my warm bed too excited for even a short nap.

The evening came and I waited in tense anticipation. I had carefully rehearsed in my mind what I would say when I saw them.

I wouldn't cry when they had to leave because I knew that would make them sad. We wouldn't speak of unhappy things, only what we would do when we were together again. I would sing the songs grandfather had taught me and I would read the stories grandmother had written. They would be so pleased.

The hours passed so slowly and I began to be afraid when they had not arrived. "Grandmother," I called, "where could they be? IT must be very late."

"I don't know, Imic," she answered softly. "Maybe they couldn't come tonight after all."

"But they said they would come," I continued. "What if something terrible happened to them?" I began to cry.

My grandfather and grandmother exchanged a fearful glance and my grandfather began walking up and down the small room. We all waited, not speacking for a long time. Finally my grandmother came close to me and said, "Imic, it is very late. We wi-l all go to sleep now. Maybe they will come tomorrow."

I started to cry, but my grandparents left the room and turned down the lamp and I was all alone. For the first time since I had been in the stall the old fear returned. I cried myself to sleep and awoke several times listening for the sound of footsteps. I heard nothing.

When I awoke I felt very tired and empty. They had not come. "Grandmother," I called, "they did not come. They are dead, they must be dead," and the crying began again. My grandmother looked suddenly very old and very tired. Her chin began to quiver. Before she could say a word, Yankel ran into my room, followed by my grandfather.

"Imic," he said excitedly, "your parents are safe." My Grandmother put her head in her hands and began to cry.

"Why didn't they come?" I asked.

"Your mother and father had planned to leave last night as soon as the sky was dark enough," Yankel explained. "They had found a place in the barbed wire fence they could roll under. They got outside the fence and began running through the woods. Just as they came to the open valley, the moon came out. The snow had not melted yet, and it was like daylight in that valley. The sheriff saw them. He shouted for them to stop. He fired a shot at them. They both fell to the ground. The sheriff came over and pointed the gun at your mother's head. They realized that he was very drunk. He told them that he was going to make them suffer before he killed them."

"Yankel, please," my grandmother interrupted. "Do you have to continue this awful story?"

"Imic's parents wanted me to tell him the whole story because they knew he would understand," he answered.

"Go on, Yankel," I said, trying to be very grown up.

Yankel continued, his voice rising. "The sheriff took them to an old hay-filled barn, shoved them both inside, threw a match in the hay and shut the door. Your father fell to the ground in the barn. Then, realizing what had happened, he jumped up and threw himself against the door. The door flew open and knocked the sheriff down. Your mother and father threw him inside the barn and ran away.

"And that's not all, Imic," Yankel continued. "After they ran away from the barn they ran to the house of the farmer whose fields they work every day. Your mother beat on the door. Finally the farmer's wife answered the door and screamed to them to leave. She told them that she would run a pitchfork through them if they didn't go away immediately. She said her brother was the sheriff and that she would call him and have them both arrested. They got very scared because they now knew who had tried to kill them. Just then the farmer appeared, half asleep, and told them to go outside and wait. His wife shouted that he was a Jew-lover and called him all kinds of names. He pushed her away and went outside. He told your parents to get in the hay wagon. He covered them with hay and drove down the road. There was the sheriff staggering along. He asked his brother-in-law if he had seen two Jews who had run away from the camp. The farmer said he hadn't seen anyone--he was on the way to town to pick up his milk supply. The sheriff took his word and went on. The farmer told your mother and father they must never try to escape again or he would kill them himself the next time."

"So why didn't he kill them this time?" I asked Yanke.

"The farmer knew they were both good workers. He needed them to work the fields," he said. "He took your parents back to the camp and they crawled through the fence and back into their stall."

Yankel finished the tale of horror with a sigh of relief. My grandparents and I just sat for a long time silently. I said a prayer to God, thnking Him for letting my parents live, and for letting me be with my grandmother and grandfather.

MANYA

Somehow during the weeks I had been with my grandparents I had erased from my mind what all of us were doing in this faraway land. Except for missing my mother and father very much, and knowing how much they were suffering, I might think we were free and just living in the country.

There were no guards watching us, and we were given food weekly. I could never understand why the men, who came every day from the camp to work for my grandfather, didn't run away and never return. They could have left at midday and not be missed until late that night when they had to report to the guard at the camp. Once I asked my grandfather why they didn't run away. He gave me a strange look, sighed deeply, and walked away. I never asked again.

But I was feeling so much better. I could walk more than a few steps without getting tired. My face was fuller, and I was gaining weight steadily. I was no longer confined to my tiny room. The long-awaited day had arrived. I could go outside and stand with my grandfather and watch the men make wheels.

Today I was free--free to go outside to feel the fresh air again, to pick up a handful of the remaining snow. I could probably even run if I wanted to. I dressed warmly. My grandmother had made a coat from the potato bags and lined it with fur from the wild rabbits my grandfather trapped. I wore a hat made from rabbit fur also. Somehow my grandfather had gotten a pair of leather shoes for me. They were not new, but I thought they were beautiful. My pants were also made from the brown potato bag and lined with the cotton sack the flour came in. I must have looked very strange, but I thought my new clothes made the best-looking outfit I had ever seen.

"Now, Imic," my grandmother cautioned, "you are not completely well. You must not overtire yourself. Do not run and jump around." I could hardly wait for her to finish before I was out the door yelling and waving to my grandfather.

"Imic," he said excitedly, "come here, my little one, and let me see you." He held out his big hand to me and pulled me close to him and hugged me.

Things were very exciting in the yard and shop—men working, the clanging of the mallets against the metal, saws cutting the wood for the wagons. I looked inside the shop and saw a fire blazing, and metal being melted for the rims. I never knew there was so much going on at one time.

I walked around the house to the back yard and looked up and down the curving dirt road. There were other houses on both sides. Other people actually lived close to us. I never knew that before, either.

As I was standing by the fence, looking up the road, I saw her. She was beautiful, with soft blonde hair hanging loosely under her kerchief. Her cheeks were rosy and she had a full tiny mouth and big blue eyes staring straight at me. She was carrying a book satchel over her shoulder and walking slowly toward me. She dropped her eyes to the ground as she approached and her walk quickened until she passed me. Who was she? Where did she come from? I wanted to speak to her, but I didn't. I just stood there staring after her until she disappeared from sight.

My thoughts were interrupted by my grandmother's voice. "Imic, where are you? It is time to eat your lunch." With a sigh, I went inside the warm house. A big bowl of steaming soup and freshly baked bread was placed in front of me.

"Grandmother," I said slowly, "who are the people who live on this road by our house?"

"Ukrainians," my grandmother answered. "Why do you ask?"

"I saw one today," I said, "walking and carrying books over her shoulder. Do they go to school?"

"Yes, Imic," she said. "Don't speak to them. They are not like us. They will only hurt you."

I didn't ask any more questions about the girl I had seen, but I knew I would have to see her again. As soon as I had finished my soup, I wanted to go back outside. But my grandmother said that I was too tired and needed my rest. "Tomorrow you may go out for a little while." I knew there was no use arguing with her, so obediently I crawled into the warm bed. Soon I was asleep.

Just before lunchtime the next day, I went quickly to the back of the yard where I had seen her the day before. I waited for a few minutes and there she was. She was walking slowly. Today she wore a red plaid coat and cap and her blond hair was like silk against her collar. I wanted so badly to speak to her, but I couldn't. Nothing came out. She looked at me and gave me a flicker of a smile, and then hurried by.

For the next few days I would wait for her at lunchtime and then watch her return to school later in the afternoon. Neither of us said a word, only a quick glance from her and a long stare from me.

I kept trying to think of ways to speak to her. Finally I came up with a plan. I would draw a picture for her and hand it to her as she walked by. It had to be just right. A beautiful picture of the mountains, with the snow on them, and a blue lake at the bottom of the mountains.

I began to work on my picture, and each time I began, it somehow didn't seem right, so I would tear it up and start over again. I wanted to put her name on the picture, but ~~[illegible]~~ I didn't know what it was. Maybe my grandmother knew it. I found her making bread in the kitchen. "Grandmother," I said, "I saw a girl the other day walking home from school--you know, I told you about her. Do you know her name?" I asked innocently.

My grandmother became visibly upset. "Imic, you are not to speak to these people. I told you before that they will hurt you. They will call you bad names and make fun of you. She is Manya, I think, but you must not look for her again."

Manya--what a beautiful name. I thought surely grandmother was wrong about her. She would not hurt me or call me names. We were both human beings. I must give her the picture with her name on it.

I went back to my room and carefully took the picture out from its hiding place. I kept it under the mattress on my bed. I printed the name MANYA on the picture and wrote my own name IMIC on the botom. I folded the picture carefully and slipped it inside my coat.

I heard grandmother getting her coat and boots on in the other room. "Imic," she called, "I am going to the farm down the road to trade for food. Do you want to come along? I will be back in time for dinner tonight." What a treat to get to go out of the yard, I thought. But if I go, I will not see Manya to give her the picture.

"No, Grandmother, I feel a little tired. I'll stay at home this time. May I go with you the next time?"

"Of course, Imic," she replied. "Now you stay inside and in the shop with your grandfather. Do not go in the back yard by the road."

For the next hour or so, I thought about what my grandmother had said, and also about Manya. Grandmother must be wrong about her, I thought to myself. I will go outside and give her the picture. Grandmother will never know.

I walked carefully and cautiously out the door and went around the back of the house. I almost expected my grandmother to call out my name. I had never disobeyed her before. I walked to the fence just in time to see Manya coming down the road. As she came close to me I softly called her name, "Manya, Manya." I could not look at her. My face felt very hot. My hands were cold and sweaty. I held the picture out to her and it dropped to the ground. We both bent to pick it up at the same time, and we were so close I could hear her breathing. Our eyes met for a brief second and I felt very dizzy. She stood up quickly, grabbed the picture and ran away.

I stood for a long time looking down the road. What had happened to me? I'd never felt so funny before even when I was so sick with high fever. I felt warm and happy inside, yet at the same time, I also felt sick to my stomach. I stood there for a long time, just thinking.

Suddenly I heard people running. I looked up and saw five boys coming right at me. The biggest one had my picture in his hand. They were shouting at me and calling me by name. "Imic, Imic!" I was very frightened. I stood there unable to move. "Dirty Jew, pig," they shouted. "Kike, rotten, dirty, filthy pig Jew," they continued shouting at me. They began throwing rocks and spitting at me. The biggest one took my picture and ripped it into many pieces and threw them on the ground. I began to cry. They kept on throwing rocks at me. One hit my head, another my face and still another my legs.

I began to run; they chased me. I fell down and the rocks came harder. I tried to cover my head with my hands and soon my hands were bleeding. I got up and ran into the house, crying and bloody. The shouts of "dirty Jew" were still ringing in my ears. I rant into my room and crawled under the bed. Surely grandfather must have heard the screaming. I listened, but all I heard was the sound of men's voices and the constant hammering of metal and the sound of the saw on the wood.

Grandmother would be home soon. She must not see me like this. My clothes were bloody and my face and hands cut from the sharp rocks. I took my clothes off and hid them under the mattress. I washed the blood off my face and hands, put on my night clothes and got quickly into bed. Just as I was pulling the covers up over me I heard the door close.

"Imic," my grandmother called. She tiptoed into my room and I closed my eyes very tightly. "Sleep well, my little Imic," she said quietly and closed my door.

I lay in the bed with my heart pounding and the tears flowing out of my eyes. How could Manya have done this to me? Why did she give my picture to those boys? Were all the people in this world cruel? What had the Jews done to be hated so?

Grandmother came in my room later to wake me for dinner. I pretended to be asleep. She stood in the darkened room for a few minutes and then left me alone.

THE LOOK OF HATE

I opened my eyes. It was very dark outside. The house was very still. All the men had gone from the shop. I listened for my grandparents' voices, but all was quiet.

I put my hand to my pounding head, and felt something sticky and thick coming from my forehead. I got out of bed and lit the coal oil lamp. I looked at myself in the high mirror, and with horror saw my face. One of my eyes was swollen shut, I had a big deep gash in my forehead and a long cut on my nose. My lips were split and bleeding. Suddenly I was gripped with fear. Grandmother--what would I tell her when she saw me, and grandfather, he would be so angry. The sheets and pillow on my bed were covered with blood and it was still oozing from my head. What was I to do? I must get help. But there was nobody to help me.

I must see my father. He would take care of me. I would walk to the camp and crawl under the barbed wire just as my parents had done when they tried to come to see me. Grandmother and grandfather would never forgive me for disobeying. I couldn't stay in this house and be discovered.

I pulled the cover over the sheet and pillow to hide the blood. My knees began to shake and I felt very weak and sick to my stomach. My hands were shaking as I turned down the lamp. I opened my window and jumped to the ground. The ground was cold and icy. I was stunned for a moment from the jump. I got up unsteadily and tried to run. I kept seeing those boys in my mind, hiding and waiting to stone me again. I was crying. I went past the workshop and out into an open field. I reached down and picked up a handful of snow and held it to my bleeding head. The cold snow dulled the pain and made it feel better. But I was so tired. I would take a rest here, in the snow, white lovely snow.

Voices, I heard voices in the distance. Something cold on my head. My legs and arms had no feeling. The voices became clearer. "Half frozen, the boy is badly cut up--looks like rock cuts," the voice said. "I'll have to sew his head—deep cut--probably lost a lot of blood. The child is in shock." I opened one eye and saw a long needle, and then I couldn't remember any more.

Suddenly I smelled something that I had smelled before--an onion. Someone was shoving a bitter raw onion in my mouth. I twisted my face away, and someone said, "It's almost over, Imic. Be still." My grandmother's voice. I gagged and gagged on the onion that was forced into my mouth. The pain in my head was terrible. The throbbing wouldn't stop. I felt as if the skin were being pulled off my face. I was falling off a deep cliff. Words became blurred and then everything was black. I don't know how many hours or days went by.

My grandmother was sitting next to me, crying. A man who was not my grandfather was standing beside my bed. He was very tall and strong looking and his face was weatherbeaten as if he spent a lot of time outside. "Grandmother," I whispered, "where am I? Who is that man?"

"Oh, Imic," she cried. "You can speak. This man is a veterinarian. He takes care of the sick animals at the collective farm."

"Why is he here? What is a veterinarian?"

"I am a doctor, Imic," he replied. "I am a doctor for animals, but I also sometimes take care of people if there is no other doctor around. You must rest now because you have been through a lot," he said sternly.

I looked around and realized I was back in my room in the little house. Then I remembered the blood on the sheets and pillow. I tried to turn my head to see if the blood was still there, but the terrible pain was still in my head. I felt the sheets with my hand and they were smooth. The blood must be gone. Grandmother must have found the blood on the sheets. "The blood," I whispered, "where is the blood?"

My grandmother leaned close to me with tears in her eyes, and said softly, "It's gone, Imic., all the blood is gone. Sleep now. We will talk later."

I sighed with relief. She knew about the blood. I closed my eyes and fell asleep.

When I awoke I felt much better. My head was still hurting, but the pounding had stopped. My legs and arms had feeling again and I could more them freely in the bed. I looked at myself in the mirror and saw no blood. My forehead had tiny black stitches in it; so did my nose. But the blood was gone. One of my eyes was still black and swollen, but I could see, and my lips were no longer puffy.

"Grandmother," I called, "please come here." She was standing beside my bed. "Grandmother," I began, "I was a very bad boy. I want to tell you what I didn," I said. My lower lip began to quiver and my voice was shaking.

"Imic," she interrupted, "the most important thing is that you are alive. You would have frozen to death in the snow if the watchman from the collective farm had not been making the rounds and found you. You must have been running away from us. Nothing you did should have frightened you enough to make you run away from your grandfather and me. We love you. You must not be afraid of us."

"I know, Grandmother," I said, "but I was very afraid because I disobeyed you. I remember now--I was going to find Father and the snow felt so good on my face, and I was so tired, I just stopped to rest."

"Now, Imic," she said, "tell me the story."

I told her about Manya and the picture and how I put my name and her name on it, and all about the boys, the rocks, and the names they called me and how frightened I was because they chased me. I explained how I hid my clothes and tried to wash the blood from my face and hands, and how I pretended to sleep when she came in to call me to dinner. When I was through, I felt that a great weight had been lifted from me.

She didnt say anything to me for a long time. Then she began to talk in a strange, almost distant voice.

"You must listen to what I have to say. I have lived a long time in this world as a Jew. The Jews are hated, feared, tortured and killed by people just like Manya and those boys. The Jews are God's people and we live by the Law and the books, not the sword as the Christians do. The Christians are our enemies. They hate us and want to kill us. They think that the Jews killed their God. This is not true, but Jews will always suffer because people believe that. You must never speak to them or look at them again. They are animals. They will kill a man just because he is a Jew. Some day the Jews will live in peace and have their own homeland. You are never ever to speak to these people again. Do you understand, Imic?"

I nodded my head and tried to tell her that Manya was different. "No," she said angrily. "None of them are different. They are all the same. Every one of them. Who do you think has made our people slaves? Who killed your other grandparents and all the other people? No, Imic, they are all cruel, wicked and ignorant people."

Her voice was getting louder and louder. I was getting frightened because she had a look in her eyes just like the boys who threw the rocks at me. I had never seen my grandmother look that way before. I closed my eyes and tried to put her face out of my mind, but her eyes and the boys' eyes kept staring at me no matter how hard I tried to shut them out.

"I'm tired now," I whispered, and pulled the covers up over me to hide.

THE GIFT

The snow was melting and the leaves were appearing on the trees. Little pink flowers were budding in the grass, and birds sang very early each morning. I went outside every morning with my grandfather to the shop. He was teaching me how to make wagon wheels. I loved the sound and smell of the saw cutting the fresh wood and the metal being hammered. The men who worked with my grandfather would come each morning from the camp and would laugh and talk with me.

I was also learning more and more about reading and writing, and my grandfather was teaching me to do mathematics. I was always eager to learn and looked forward to the evenings because that was the time we would have our "lesson." We had no books so I learned from stories grandfather would write down. Then I would write stories for grandfather to read. Grandfather was a very smart man, and most of the stores he wrote were from the Bible. I learned about Moses, Abraham and the Jewish people.

At lunchtime each day, I would come inside and go to the kitchen window to look for Manya. In my heart I didn't believe she had told the boys to hurt me. She just couldn't have done that.

The time passed quickly. The air was warmer each day and more flowers were blooming. As the snow melted, it left fast-running little streams along the sides of the road. I often watched boys on their way home from school sailing paper boats in them. I wanted very much to sail a boat too. I could make one out of paper and sail it when there was no one else around.

One morning, very early, my grandfather came into my room. I was just opening my eyes when I saw him sitting beside my bed. "Good morning, Imic," he said. "I have a surprise for you."

"A surprise for me?" I sat up quickly. "Oh, Grandfather, what is it?" He handed me a little box and waited for me to open it. I opened it quickly. "Oh, Grandfather, a boat--a beautiful wooden boat. This one won't sink, will it?"

"No, Imic," he chuckled, "this boat won't sink. It is made of wood and the sail is cut from cloth. It will sail all the way down the little river."

My little boat was just the right size, perfectly carved from wood, with a white sail. I jumped from the bed and began throwing on my clothes. "Slow down, Imic," Grandfather said kindly. "You have to eat your breakfast first, and then I need your help in the shop. You can sail your boat later in the morning."

"Oh, I can't wait," I said. "I want to sail it now."

"No, Imic," he said firmly, "you will sail it when I say it is time, not until then." I nodded glumly and got dressed for breakfast.

As I was walking with my grandfather to the shop after breakfast, I heard the laughter of the children on their way to school. I suddenly realized why grandfather said I couldn't sail my boat until he said so. He did not want the boys to steal my boat or hurt me or call me names. Slowly I was beginning to understand. I squeezed my grandfather's hand. "Thank you for my boat, Grandfather. I will sail it when you tell me I can."

About an hour later, grandfather came to me where I was working. My job was to sort nails. I took the rusty nails and put them in one barrel, the bent ones in another and the good nails in yet another. "Imic," he said, "you may sail your boat now, but do not go further than the fence. When you hear the whistle for lunch you must come home."

I skipped happily away to sail my beautiful new boat. The road behind the house led from town to the camp. All along the way were small farms. They were part of a very big farm, the collective, which was owned by the government. Each day the German Army would send men and women from the camp out to work in the fields and prepare the wheat for the harvest.

My parents worked on a farm all the way on the other side of the collective, about ten miles from our house. We lived just outside the collective. A big fence not far from our house marked where it began. There was also a garage near the fence where all the tractors and farm equipment were kept. I had never been inside the fence except the night I tried to get to my father and had fallen in the snow. The children who passed by our house each day all lived on the farms. Their parents produced wheat for the government. They were given money for their wheat and a house to live in.

The Jews from the camp who worked the farms were given no money, but they did get some food in exchange for their labor. My grandfather had explained all this to me one night when I awoke from a terrible dream about my parents. I dreamed they were starving, that my father was kept locked in a tiny black room and not allowed to come out. In my dream my mother was screaming and calling my name.

My grandfather heard me cry out. When I told him about the dream he explained that my parents had food to eat and that they were well.

At last I put my little boat in the water and it sailed and bobbled and toppled and then righted itself again, but it did not sink. I took my boat out of the water and ran up the road toward town and put it in the water again. It sailed so fast—all the way down to the fence--a long fast trip. Over and over I sailed the boat, each time putting it in the water farther up the road. I was far away from our house now. I put my boat in the stream again. Down it went, faster and faster. I was trying to keep up with the little white sail when suddenly I heard the noon whistle blow. Grandfather said I must come home when the whistle blew. I began to run because the little boat was getting ahead of me.

Just as I reached the fence and grabbed my boat out of the water, I saw a wagon with three people in it on the other side. It was pulled by a donkey and filled with hay and bundles of wheat. They seemed to be farmers going to the collective farm office to turn in their quota for the day.

But these farmers looked somehow different. There were two men and a woman. The men had on the baggy pants, full blouse and heavy boots that all Ukrainian men wore. The woman had on a long skirt, kerchief and full blouse. I ran very close to the fence to see them better.

I was staring at these people in the wagon when one man turned and looked at me. I felt a chill go down my spine and I began to shake. The man in that farm wagon was my father. His eyes met mine for a moment, but there was instant recognition and communication between us. He quickly turned away, and then my mother looked. She too talked to me with her eyes. I was just about to call out to them when someone put a hand over my mouth and a hand on my shoulder. It was my grandfather.

When the wagon had passed he said, "Go inside, Imic, do as I say, go quickly inside and tell your grandmother they are here." In a daze, I ran into the house and began frantically trying to repeat the message to my grandmother. My voice was shaking, my hands were cold, and my legs were trembling so badly I had to sit down. My grandmother smiled and took me in her arms and held me tightly.

Soon I heard the kitchen door open and there they stood, my mother and father. I ran into their waiting, outstretched arms and began to cry and laugh and kiss them. Soon we were all crying and hugging each other and laughing and everyone was talking at once.

"Oh, Mama, Papa, you are really here!" I said with tears in my eyes. "How did you get here? Why are you wearing farmers' clothes? Who was that other man in the wagon? Can I go with you?"

"Imic, Imic," my father said, "so many questions. Let me just look at you, my son. You look so healthy and well. Your hair has grown back, and the best thing of all is that you look strong and can walk again." His eyes were staring at me as if he couldn't believe that I had changed so much. The last time he had seen me I couldn't walk and I was very sick. My mother kept touching my hair and my cheek.

My mother and father both looked so much older than I remembered. My father's hair was thinner and my mother's hair was turning gray. They were both so thin and had dark circles under their eyes. I looked at my mother's hands, hands that once were so soft and lovely. Now they were wrinkled and hard-looking with cuts and scratches all over them. Her fingernails were broken and dirty, and the bones in her hands seemed to stock out. I wanted to cry for my mother, but I was so glad to see her I just hugged her tightly.

"We must go soon," she said. "The farmer will be back for us as soon as he has finished turning in his wheat for the week."

"Please, Mama, Papa, tell me how you got here."

"All right, Imic," my father said. "It's a very long story, but I'll tell you as quickly as I can." My grandfather, grandmother and I pulled our chairs closer and listened intently as my father began his story.

"Your mother and I have been working for the same farmer since we arrived in Sumeuka. We were assigned to him by the Germans after we arrived here. Do you remember when you were very sick and we used to leave you each day to go out to work in the fields?" I nodded, remembering how frightened I was to be left alone in the little stall day after day. It all seemed so long ago.

He continue. "Your mother and I worked very hard, we never complained, and we never stopped to talk to the others. We would arrive at the farm very early each morning and work until dark. We would take only a few minutes to eat some bread at noon time. At first the farmer watched us very carefully and then he realized that he could do other things he needed to do while we were there. He was the one who helped us the night your mother and I tried to come see you.

"The farmer has a little boy about your age," he continued, "and he understood how much we missed you. Your mother talks to him about you all the time. She told him we hadn't seen you in six months. She has been very nice to his little boy. Once when his son got sick with a high fever and the doctor couldn't come, your mother brought an onion to the farmer and told him to have his child such on it and the fever would go away. That very night the child's fever broke and by the next day, he was feeling much better. The farmer was very pleased and promised us that he would help us come here to see you."

Maybe the onion really did work after all. My father went on.

"The farmer came to us yesterday toward the end of the day and told us that he had made arrangements to bring his wheat to the office today and that we might come with him and see you for a little while. He gave us these clothes so the guards would think we were farmers, and we all got on the wagon and came here."

There was a long silence. I was thinking about what grandmother had said about all Ukrainians being mean and hating the Jews. Grandmother must have been thinking the same thing because as I looked up, her eyes met mine for a brief second, and then she looked down again.

"Now for the good news," my father said brightly. "It seems as if the farmers have been getting very angry at the Germans. They need the Jews from the camp to work the fields of the government-owned farms. They told the Germans that too many Jews were weak and dying because of lack of food, shelter and medical supplies. If the Jews can't work the fields, then the German Army can't be fed and the farmers can't get paid. The Germans have agreed to give the Jews better treatment so we can do more work on the farms.'

"When the Germans came here and took over Sumeuka, many people, mostly Russian Communists, ran away. Their houses were left empty. The Germans have agreed that the Jews from the camp can live in these houses."

"Oh, Father," I said with great excitement, "does that mean that I can come and live with you and Mama again?"

"I don't know for sure, Imic, that we will get a house, but if we do, yes, you will come and live with us again," he said.

At that moment there was a knock at the door. It was the farmer telling my parents it was time to go back to the camp. They got up very quickly, kissed and hugged me, grandmother and grandfather, and then they were gone.

The joy my grandparents and I felt at seeing my mother and father again lasted for several days. At last I had something to really look forward to. I had a chance to live with my parents again.

One day, about six weeks later, Yankel ran into the house. He was very excited. "It's happened," he shouted. "Today it was announced that certain people were being allowed to move from the camp into the houses."

I shouted with joy. "I knew it! I can live with my mother and father again."

My grandmother looked expectantly at Yanke. "Yes," Yankel replied, "your parents were given a house. They'll be sharing one not far from here with two other couples, and the Germans have given permission for you to live with them. They'll be moving tomorrow and will come here to get you on the way," Yankel said. Tomorrow--a whole day away.

"I must pack," I said. Then I began to laugh. "I have nothing to pack--only my few clothes and my wooden boat. Grandfather," I said, "may I take the stories you have written for me so that I can practice my reading?"

"Of course, Imic," he replied. "You may take them all with you, and I will write more to give you. We will continue your studies after you leave. We will see each other very often."

Suddenly I felt very sad. I was so happy to be with my parents again that I hadn't thought about leaving my grandmother and grandfather. They had been so kind, and loved me very much. I ran to my grandmother and hugged her very tightly. "I shall miss you terribly, Grandmother. I will write letters to you every day. And Grandfather, I will come and help you with the wagon wheels."

"I will miss you terribly also, Imic," my grandmother said. "But we will see each other often. I would like it very much if you would write me a long letter every day."

"You come when you can, Imic," my grandfather said. "Your job will always be open for you." He gave my hand a squeeze.

TOGETHER

Early the next morning when my parents arrived, I was all ready to go. I had all my belongings in a little brown sack--the clothes my grandmother had made for me, my shoes, my wooden boat and all the stories grandfather had written. I kissed and hugged Grandmother and Grandfather, and said goodbye to all the men in the shop and a special goodbye to Yankel. Then I went to every room in our little house and said goodbye. I was ready to go.

There were four people in the wagon waiting for us. I was introduced to Mr. and Mrs. Jacobs and Mr. and Mrs. Abrams. They were to live in the house with us. I had seen them before but had forgotten their names. I found out later that their children had been passengers on the circus wagon.

In the back of the wagon were more brown sacks like the one I was carrying. I put mine with the others and climbed aboard. I turned and waved to my grandparents and saw that tears were running down my grandmother's face. "I'll write to you, Grandmother," I shouted. "Every day." And off we went down the dirt road behind my grandparents' house.

We hadn't gone very far before my father announced that we had arrived. I was expecting a very long trip so I was very surprised. We were not more than fifteen minutes away from my grandparents' house.

My first reaction to the house was shock. It was even smaller than my grandparents'. Several of the windows were broken and there was broken glass all over the floor. Everything was filthy. Dirt was everywhere. Garbage littered the floor.

The house had three rooms—a living room, a bedroom and a kitchen. Almost half the kitchen was taken up by a large oven with a flat surface on top. The top of the oven became our bed. I couldn't understand why my parents were so pleased until the first cold night. The heat from the oven rose and kept us very warm.

The first thing my parents did when we arrived was to unload the wagon. I was surprised to see so many things. There was flour, potatoes, wheat, a small amount of meat and several pots and pans. There were even dishes, although they were cracked and old. My mother told me that the farmer she worked for had given her the things for the kitchen.

We began to clean the house. The women scrubbed the floors, walls and stove. My grandfather had given my father some nails, wooden planks and a hammer, and the men began to repair the broken furniture and the holes in the walls and windows. By late afternoon our little house looked very different.

I carefully unpacked my few belongings and put them in a little box beside the stove. My mother and the other women cooked our first dinner. We had potato pancakes and boiled beef. It was the most delicious meal I had ever had.

That night, when all was quiet and our beds had been fixed with straw and blankets, I kept touching my mother and father to make sure they were still there.

The next morning I awoke just in time to see my mother and father leaving. "Where are you going?" I asked. "DO you have to leave here so soon?" I asked sleepily.

My mother kissed me and said gently, "It is time for us to go to work in the fields. You go back to sleep. There is food in the oven when you get hungry. We will be back this evening."

"Can't I come too?"

"Soon," she replied, "but not today. You may play in the yard, but don't wander off."

I drifted back to sleep and awoke some time later with a start. I jumped from the oven and ran to the window. I had heard a noise that sounded like an animal just outside the house. I saw a pig, the biggest pig I had ever seen, rooting in the ground just below the window. I put my clothes on and started for the door just as I heard a voice yelling at the pig. I had learned a few Russians words by that time and the voice was scolding the pig and ca-ling her a bad girl. The pig kept oinking and the voice kept scolding.

As I reached the door and opened it, I came face to face with Manya. It was her voice I had heard.

MANYA AGAIN

Manya looked at me for an instant and then took a stick and pushed the pig. I felt my face turn red and I just stood there. Finally I walked over to Manya and the pig and took the stick from her hand and gently prodded the pig across the yard. Manya followed slowly, staring at me all the time. When we had reached the edge of my yard I handed her the stick. She said, "Thank you, Imic," and quickly put the pig in the pen and ran inside the house next door.

I sat down in our yard in disbelief. Manya, the girl I had thought about so long, lived next door to us. But the thing that surprised me most was that she remembered my name. I had put my name on the picture I had drawn for her so long ago.

As I walked slowly back into our house, I saw Manya leaving for school. I waved to her, but she didn't look at me. I was waiting outside when she returned from school. I walked over to her and said hello. "I can't talk to you," she said, "you are a Jew. Please go away. My mother made me promise I wouldn't talk to Jews. I'll get into trouble. Please leave me alone." She ran into her house.

I felt very sad and slowly turned away. I heard a soft voice call my name. I turned and saw Manya motioning for me to come back. "My mother isn't home," she said. "You can help me with the pig." She explained that her job was to walk the pig before and after school each day. Her parents worked on a farm and didn't get home until dark. She seemed very afraid of me and kept looking at me to be sure I was not going to hurt her.

"Don't tell anyone you talked to me or I'll get a beating with my father's strap," she said. I wanted to ask her why her parents hated the Jews, but I didn't. I only nodded my head to let her know our secret was safe.

I looked forward to every day now. After my parents left I would go outside to help Manya with the pig. In the afternoon we would tie the pig to a big tree behind the house, and she would teach me to read Russian from her schoolbook.

The days were becoming warmer and longer as spring came. The grass was very green and flowers were everywhere. In front of our house, across the road, was a beautiful valley with tall grass and many small white and yellow flowers. At the very bottom of the valley there was a brook that flowed very fast and made little ripples as it hurried across the shiny stones at the bottom. Each day, while my parents were in the fields and Manya was at school, I would explore the valley and sail my little boat down the stream. Often I would pick the yellow and white flowers and make necklaces for Manya. We would pretend that she was the Flower Queen of the valley and I was the King.

As the days went quickly by I was learning more and more Russian from Manya. She was very patient with me. Sometimes I would forget and start speaking Yiddish. She would look frightened until I went back to the Russian.

"Manya," I finally asked one afternoon, "why do your parents hate Jews?"

She looked at me for a long time before answering. "They say that the Jews killed our God, and that the Jews are no better than animals."

"Do you think so, Manya?"

"No," she said. "I don't think you're like that, but I have never talked to Jews. You're different--you're my friend. My parents would punish me if they knew you were my friend."

The sun was getting lower and we both knew our parents would be home soon. Silently we left each other and went inside our houses.

The evenings in our home were happy. My parents and the others would sit around the stove in the kitchen after dinner and tell stories about their childhood and the happy lives they had before the war. My mother would help me with my reading and mathematics, and I would write to Grandmother and Grandfather.

"Imic," my mother said one night, "I know how much you would like to be able to come to work with your father and me. I spoke to the farmer today and he agreed that you may come and work with us starting next week. He was afraid you couldn't do the work, but I told him I thought you could. You have nothing to do here all day and you need to be busy."

I felt my face tighten and my hands begin to sweat. To go each day with my parents meant I would not see Manya at all. I must think of a plan in the next week. I nodded my head and said nothing.

The next morning I told Manya about the conversation with my mother. She looked very sad. "I'll miss you, Imic. You're my best friend. And you know how to take care of the pig better than anyone."

The pig--that was it. I would get a job with Manya's parents watching the pig during the day. But her parents wouldn't even talk to me. How could I convince them to let me take care of the pig?

That afternoon when Manya came home from school, I didn't see her for a long time. Finally I heard a knock on the door. "What's wrong, Manya?" I asked.

"It's my mother,"she answered. "She's very sick. She had to leave work today and come home. The doctor is there now. He says she has a high fever and can't be left along. It might be two weeks before she can get up again. I will have to stay with her, and I can't go to school. I can't play with you until she's better." She touched my hand and ran back to her house.

I stood very still, watching her, and suddenly I had my answer. If Manya had to stay with her mother, then someone had to walk the pig. That someone would be me. I would speak to her father. I went to the valley to watch for him. I didn't have long to wait. My heart was pounding and I was shaking as I ran up to him.

"Excuse me, sir," I said in my practiced Russian. "My name is Imic Raboi and I live next door. I hear your wife is sick and you have no one to care for your prize pig. I know a lot about pigs, and I can care for your every day."

"You speak Russian, and you are a Jew. What do you know about caring for a pig?" he said as he walked on.

"Please, sir, let me try. I will do a good job--I really will."

"All right," he said. "A ruble a week if you do good the first week. Come and get the pig early tomorrow morning. If anything happens to my pig you'll be sorry." He looked at me with hate and walked on.

I had done it. I had gotten the job. Now to tell my parents.

My mother and father asked many questions and seemed satisfied with my answers. After much discussion, they agreed. They never suspected that Manya was the reason I wanted the job.

I didn't see Manya those next two weeks except through the window when I went over every morning to get the pig. She would watch for me and wave and then move quickly away.

How I hated that pig! She was fat and dirty and smelled. She would root up the flowers and grass and roll in the mud where her food was. How Manya's parents could even want that pig, I couldn't understand. But as long as I could play with Manya, I would try to like the pig.

Finally, Manya's mother got well and went back to work. Manya went back to school. Her father had been pleased with my work and said now that Manya could go to school I should go on with my job and take care of the pig during the day while Manya was away.

My parents were very happy with me. The few rubles I earned were used for special things like sugar, salt and chocolate.

One day as Manya and I were reading from her book, she started to giggle. "What's so funny?" I asked.

"My father still doesn't understand how you can speak Russian," she said. "He thinks you must have learned to speak Russian from one of the soldiers."

"Does he talk about me?" I asked. "What does he say?"

"He says," she said slowly, "you seem to be a nice boy--that it's a shame you're a Jew."

I felt very sad and looked at the ground. Manya touched my face with her soft little hand and said, "Don't be sad, Imic, I love you. Let's go inside my house. Everyone is away at work. I'll show you my favorite game."

I grabbed her hand and pulled her up and off we ran to her house. We went inside quietly and stood very still in the cool living room.

How different her house was from mine. There was beautiful furniture and a soft, thick, colorful rug on the floor. Paintings hung on the walls and pretty dishes were placed in a big glass cabinet over by the high window, a window so high that it had a big windowseat.

"Come," she said, "I'll show you my secret place. You must never tell anyone about it. Only you and I will know." She went over to the windowseat and lifted the top us. Inside was indeed a secret hiding place. "Get inside," she urged. I followed her inside and she closed the top. At first it was very dark, and then she moved a little piece of wood and I could see everything in the living room.

"How do you like it, Imic?" she said, touching my hand.

"I like it very much, Manya. Thank you for showing it to me," I said.

"Imic, promise me we will always be best friends and you will never love anyone else," she said.

"I promise, Manya," I said in a shaking voice. "I will never love anyone else." I held her hand very tightly and with my heart pounding I reached over and kissed her on the lips.

Just then we heard footsteps and a voice shouting, "Manya, Manya, where are you?" It was Manya's mother. I was shaking and I could feel Manya shaking beside me. Her mother walked into every room calling her name and then said to herself, "I guess she had to stay after school today--her books aren't here."

Manya had left her books by the tree where we had been reading and watching the pig. The pig, we had forgotten the pig! I had to get our and find that pig.

I heard Manya's mother in the kitchen getting out pots and pans to cook supper. I silently slipped out of the secret place and ran to look for the pig. I looked everywhere. The pig was nowhere in sight. Manya's father must have heard me calling for the pig because he was coming toward me with a big stick.

"Where is our pig?" he shouted. "What have you done with our pig, you stupid Jew? I should have known you couldn't do the job. You Jews are all alike. You can't be trusted, you dirty little animal."

He began to beat me with the stick. He pushed me down and kicked me. I screamed, and then I blacked out. He slapped me hard and I came to. He dragged me to my house and threw me against the wall. He shouted to my mother, "Keep your filthy little animal at home, you rotten Jews. He lost my pig--my prize pig is gone."

I was bleeding everywhere as my mother carried me in the house. She said to him in Yiddish, "I hope God punishes you, you wicked man, and makes your filthy pig die." She bathed my wounds with cool water and kept patting me and telling me that everything would be all right. She spoke of the cruelty of the Russians, how they were stupid and uneducated. "How dare he lay a hand on you. He is not good enough to touch you." She went on and on as she washed the cuts and cleaned my blood-covered face.

I felt sick inside, not because of the pain from the stick or the boot, but because I would probably never see Manya again. I would have to go to the fields with my parents. Her father would forbid her to see me again. It was all over now.

Early the next morning, as the sun was coming up, I heard screams from Manya's yard. Manya's mother and father were standing in the yard looking at the pig. The pig was dead.

THE PARTISANS

Summer arrived. Each day came with a bright sun that warmed us as we worked in the fields.

Every morning my mother, father and I would get up, eat some bread, drink a glass of milk, and set out for the wheat fields. We would work until the sun was high over our heads. When a whistle sounded, we would sit on the ground between the rows of wheat where it was cool. Mother would take a few pieces of bread and cheese from our knapsack and we ate. After a few minutes, the whistle would blow a second time and we would begin our work again, moving slowly down the rows of wheat until the sun was far on the other side of the sky. Another whistle sounded late in the day, the signal that our workday was over.

Each day the farmer rode by on his horse to check on the workers. Once he stopped and gave me a ride, but usually he would just move on to the next group. He seemed very nice, but we had all heard storeis of him whipping some of the Jews when he didn't think they were working hard enough.

Once a week the sheriff, his brother-in-law, would ride through the fields. All the Jews were very afraid of this man because often, especially if he was drunk, he would take a leather whip and beat the Jews for no reason at all. It was said that once he shot and killed a woman in the fields because she asked for a drink of water for her child. My mother and father were more afraid of him than the others because of the night he had tried to kill them.

I did not see Manya at all because we left very early in the morning and returned in the evening after dark.

We worked in the fields six days a week and we were off on the seventh day, which was Sunday. Often we went to visit my grandparents. Grandfather would have a story for me to read or a problem in mathematics for me to solve. I would take my little boat along to sail. Grandmother would always have a special treat for me. A cookie, a piece of cake or candy, or maybe a piece of fruit, things we never had at our house.

My parents and grandparents would share any news they had about the war. No one knew very much about what was going on in the rest of Russia. They heard that the fighting was about three hundred miles away, deeper into the country. The war seemed so far away, really unimportant to our daily lives.

As the summer faded and the air became cooler, we stcpped going to grandmother's house on Sunday. We would get up very early and to into the forest. Deep inside, where there was little sun, my mother, father and I would gather sticks that had fallen to the ground. My father taught me how to bundle the fagotts and carry them on my back. We carried the tied bundles into town and sold them at the marketplace for firewood. The few rubles a week we earned was spent on food, food that we couldn't get from the farmer.

One Sunday as I woke up and looked outside, I saw that the sky was still very dark. I shivered a bit as I dressed to go with my parents. We started our trip before the sun rose. The sun was a beautiful sight to see through the leaves of the trees. It made little paths of light on the ground. When the sunlight shone on a rock, the rock became a dazzling stone. I picked up the glistening stone, but it became just a plain everyday rock as soon as it was away from the bright light.

Suddenly we heard a loud thundering in the distance. I looked at the sky, but it was clear. The thundering was coming closer. I ran to my parents, and the three of us huddled together. Before any of us could say anything, about twenty-five horses with riders approached us. My mother began to cry. She held my hand tightly, and I could feel her fingers getting cold even through her gloves.

The men were dressed in uniforms with fur hats that had a red star on the front. The German soldiers did not dress like that. "Who are you?" the leader said in Russian. My parents did not understand much Russian and stood there frozen, very small against the big horse and rider. "Answer me," the man demanded.

In a meek faltering voice I said, "My parents do not understand your language. They speak only Yiddish." When I said the word "Yiddish" my parents both stared at me in disbelief. My father put his hand over my mouth to keep me from saying more.

Suddenly another man spoke--in perfect Yiddish. "Don't be afraid. We won't hurt you. We only want to talk to you." When my mother heard this, she loosened the grip on my hand and my father took his hand from my mouth. "Now, who are you?" the man speaking Yiddish asked.

"We are Jews from the collective farm. We work in the fields, harvesting the wheat," my father answered.

"Your name, please," the man continued.

My parents glanced briefly at each other and then my father said, "I am Velvel Raboi and this is my wife and son. We live nearby in an abandoned house and have been given permission to gather wood on Sundays to sell at the market in town."

There was a rumbling of conversation among the men and another man spoke in Yiddish. "Raboi, a most unusual name. The name of one of our members is Raboi, Chaim Leib. Would you know him?"

"Chaim Leib is my brother. You have news of him?" my father asked excitedly.

"Yes," the man replied. "We are partisans. We fight behind the German lines to help the Russians. Your brother is well. He's about one hundred miles from here working with another of our groups."

"Are you a Jew?" my father asked in disbelief.

"Yes. Many of us are Jews who escaped the Germans and joined the Russians to help those that the Germans have enslaved."

"We thought Chaim Leib was dead," my father said.

"Oh, no," the man said. "He is very much alive. He's been very successful stopping the German supply trains from reaching their destinations."

Suddenly the war had become real.

"Have you been treated well?" another man asked.

"Yes," my father replied. He described how and why we were living as we were.

The same man then asked, "Are the townspeople and the farmers treating you well?"

My father's answer was quick. "All but one. The sheriff. He has tortured and killed many Jews. He shot a woman just because she aked for water. We are all very afraid of him."

My father's words were translated into Russian for the group. "We'll take care of that," the man said promptly. "Return to your home now, and don't say anything about seeing us here or any part of our conversation. You won't be harmed in any way. I'll tell your brother we've seen you. Go home now," he finished, and abruptly all the men turned their horses and rode off.

The three of us stood there silently after they had gone. I had a million questions to ask, but knew enough to remain quiet.

Finally, my father spoke. "I had heard that there were partisans around here, but I didn't really believe it. We'll do as they said. If anything happens to the sheriff no one can ever know that we were the ones who told thepartisans. Imic, you must never mention this to anyone--not even to your grandparents. Do you understand?" I nodded. I had never heard my father use that tone of voice before. I knew whatever the partisans were was a very serious business.

We left the gathered wood on the ground and went back to our house. Mrs. Jacobs was busy baking bread in the kitchen.

"Back so soon, Chava?" she questioned my mother. "Where is the wood?"

My mother looked straight at me and said, without flinching, "Imic isn't feeling well. He got sick in the forest and we brought him home."

"Oh, Imic," Mrs. Jacobs replied, "I'm sorry you're sick. Perhaps you should lie down for a while."

"Yes," I lied. "I feel very sick." I climbed up to my bed and got under the blanket.

Soon the Abrams and Jacobs left to gather their own wood. The minute they were gone, I turned to my mother. "Why did you say I was sick, Mother? I feel fine."

"I'm sorry, Imic," she said, "but sometimes in order to keep others from getting hurt, you have to lie. Mrs. Jacobs sometimes doesn't remember to keep things to herself, and I couldn't tell her about our meeting the men."

"I understand, Mother," I said. "We could all be in trouble if Mrs. Jacobs told anyone."

"Yes, Imic, we could all be in trouble," she said.

Very early the next morning there was a loud knocking on the kitchen door. I trembled with fear. But I felt great relief when I heard my grandfather's booming voice.

"What are you doing here?" my father asked. By this time the Abrams, the Jacobs and my mother were up and in the kitchen to see what the disturbance was about.

"It's the sheriff," my grandfather said seriously. "He's dead. He was eating his dinner last night and someone fired a shot though the window and blew his head off. They think the partisans did it, that the Jews told them what he was like. The Germans are looking for the Jew who told."

My mother's and father's eyes met for a brief instant. "What should we do?" my father asked.

"I don't really know," my grandfather replied. "No one knows who tole. Do you know?"

"No," my father said quickly. "How did you hear about it?"

"When the guards brought the men to the shop this morning they questioned me about the partisans. I convinced them I knew nothing, and they told me about the sheriff. They'll question everyone who works the farms in this area," he finished. "Don't say I was here. Go to the fields as if nothing happened. I'll talk to you as soon as I can."

After my grandfather left, there was much excited discussion. My parent said very little. They just listened to the others wonder who could have told the partisans.

THE ORDER

Early the next morning we were awakened by a loudspeaker. I was very frightened and clung to my mother.

"Now hear this," the voice said, "all Jews in Sumeuka will report to the market square in one hour. Those not obeying this order will be shot!"

The other two women were crying, but my mother seemed very calm and said absolutely nothing. The men were trying to figure out what would happen to us.

We walked into town, just as we had done on so many Sundays with our wood. Wagons filled with goods for the market passed us on the road. Mostof the people in the wagons looked at us with hatred and disgust. A few called us names. One man spat on my father. My father did not look at him. He just kept walking, his eyes straight ahead, my mother on one side and me on the other.

The market was very still and quiet. I looked around and saw all the people I had known at the camp. I saw Yankel standing close to my grandparents. No one spoke. In the middle of the market square was a large open area with a public water fountain in the center. On the far side were the stalls where the farmers and townspeople sold their wares. On the other side of the square was a steep hill leading to the Bugg River and a walking bridge.

It had been just about an hour since the loudspeaker had delivered the order. The sun was rising. Whispers started to rise from the crowd. I clung to my parents, saying nothing. Other children were crying and asking questions. Their parents seemed not to notice at all.

Suddenly, a German Army jeep with two German soldiers drove up to the fountain. Above the windshield of the jeep was a machine gun pointed directly at the crowd. We all moved closer together. I held tighter to my mother and father when one of the soldiers put his hand up. The silence was immediate.

We were standing in front of the crowd and I could see very clearly the look of pleasure on the soldier's face as he spoke.

"The beloved sheriff of Sumeuka has been murdered. We know it was you dirty Jews who caused his murder. Those among you who are responsible for this will step forward." No one moved. My father's grip on my hand tightened.

The soldier continued. "Since you are all cowards and refuse to obey, we will teach you a lesson. You are all filthy animals and must be treated as such. All men go to the left side of the square--all women and children to the right. Move!" he screamed at us. Slowly the crowd began to separate. The men moved to the side of the square facing the river, the rest to the other side facing the men. "All men will turn toward the river," he shouted.

The soldier in the jeep turned the machine gun toward the backs of the men, now standing in a straight line facing the river. The women began to scream. The men were to be shot right in front of us.

My father was the first man in line. When the soldier pointed the machine gun at his head, I screamed. I broke away from my mother and ran toward him. He took his wallet from his pocket and threw it at me. It landed at my feet. I bent down to pick it up. As I straightened up, I saw the gun pointing at my head. Panicked, I ran to my mother and hid behind her. The women and children were screaming, crying and falling to the ground. Some were uncontrollably beating their heads against the concrete blocks circling the square.

"March!" the soldier ordered the men. Soon they were out of sight down the steep cliff. The jeep moved to the edge of the square and the gun was pointed down toward the men. The hysteria mounted. Then we heard it. The sound. Like hundreds of shots being fired. All the men were dead, murdered. I began to scream terrible things to the soldiers. My mother slapped my face and put her hand over my mouth.

"All women and children return to your houses immediately. Your husbands are dead," the soldier ordered.

Dazed with grief, in a state of shock, we began the walk home. Women around us kept falling to the ground and sobbing and beating the earth with clenched fists.

I don't know how we reached our house, but suddenly we were inside, my mother, Mrs. Jacobs, Mrs. Abrams and me. We all sat down and began to cry, louder and louder until the cries became wails and then screams. My mother was holding me and rocking back and forth in the chair, a glazed look in her eyes. The other two women were crying and beating the floor.

Exhaustion replaced the screams. We all sat without moving, without speaking. I wanted to say something to help my mother, but no words would come--only the image of my father, so strong and brave, throwing me his wallet. He was gone. My father, whom I loved and who loved me. My father, who was willing to die rather than leave me alone on the road. My father, weak from sickness and hunger, burying his own father in the snow and preventing another man from stealing his gold teeth. My wonderful father. Now he was gone, dead. Grandmother always said God would take care of the Jews. Where was God now? How could he let my father die?

I began to sob, deep sobs that hurt. They kept coming from deep inside of me. Finally there was nothing left, and the sobs became whimpers. We continued to sit, silent, staring, not believing. Hours passed and still we sat--all of us in the tiny kitchen--staring. The women began to rock back and forth saying prayers intermingled with tears.

Late in the afternoon, the kitchen door suddenly opened. There stood my father, Mr. Jacobs and Mr. Abrams.

It couldn't be the men. We had heard the shots. They were all dead. We had seen the soldiers fire the gun.

Then there was hysteria. "Papa, Papa," I screamed, jumping on him. "You're alive, you're alive." I kept touching his face. "Mama, look, Papa's alive," I shouted.

"Yes, Imic, I'm alive," my father said, tears rolling down his cheeks. When we finally quieted down, my father told us what had happened.

"The Germans wanted to teach us a lesson and torture our wives and children. But they knew they couldn't kill us all because they need us to work in the fields. They couldn't kill us, but they could terrify us. When the order was given, we all marched down the steep cliff. We were told to go into the Bugg River up to our necks. One man swam across. He was shot and killed as he was climbing out on the other side. The rest of us did as we were told. Then the Germans fired over our heads. That's what you heard. We could hear the screaming, but were ordered not to make a shound. We would be shot if we tried to speak.

"After all the women and children had been told to go home, we were taken from the river, lined up around the fountain and ordered to take off our shirts. The two soldiers beat us with whips. The townspeople started to stone us. We were warned that the next time anything happened our wives and children would be shot. More German soldiers came. They spat on us, all of them, and drove away." He finished with a sob and buried his head in his hands.

Suddenly, as if something inside of him had spoken, he quickly straightened up. His voice was strong. "We must be brave. We must not give up. Someday we'll be free human beings again. We must not forget."

THE REUNION

We went back to work in the fields. The farmer was still very nice to us, and occasionally gave us a little extra food. He never mentioned his brother-in-law's death, but I had overheard my grandfather saying that the farmer's wife had become hysterical and demanded that her husband stop giving the Jews food. When he refused, they had a terrible fight. She tried to kill him, and he beat her badly. She left him with their son and went to live with her sister in another town some distance away.

We heard no more news of the war, nor did we see the partisans again. Sometimes I would have a dream about those men. It was always the same dream. I was standing in the forest with my parents. We had just finished having a picnic in the woods. Suddenly the men rode up, dressed in their uniforms. There was Manya, sitting with the leader astride the biggest horse. When the leader asked who we were, Manya spoke. "The boy is my friend. He is good, and so are his parents." Then the men told each of us to get on a horse behind one of them. The leader said: "We have come to take you home where you will be safe and free people again." We all rode off very fast toward the sunset. The dream seemed so real that when I awoke it would be a few minutes before I knew I was still in Sumeuka in our little house with the Jacobs and the Abrams.

We no longer went to the forest on Sundays. My father said the market wasn't safe for Jews anymore. Some Sundays he would go to the forest alone to gather wood for the winter, making three or four trips before the sun came up. We would all stay home after that for the rest of the day. We even stopped visiting grandmother and grandfather. Jews had been beaten and sometimes killed walking on the road on Sundays and we could take no chances.

On Sundays, the women would prepare food for the rest of the week. The delicious smell of freshly baked bread would float through our little house, and the whole place seemed very warm and cozy. The men had made a garden beside the house and on Sundays they would gather the ripe vegetables and plant more for the next spring. I couldn't think of the next spring. It was too far away. Where would I be next spring? Only God knew that. Sometimes I wondered if God cared where I was at any time.

This morning as I awakened, I knew it was Sunday. The sun was already up, and everyone around me was busy cooking, cleaning, planting, talking. I wanted to be outside in the sunshine and feel the cool crisp air. The leaves on the trees had turned golden with a few red ones here and there, and in many places the grass was still green. I wanted to take my boat to the valley across the road and sail it in the little brook. I had not been permitted to go there since the trouble. As she was taking bread from the oven, I asked my mother if I could go.

"I guess so, Imic," she replied. "Be very careful and speak to no one. You be back here when the sun is straight up in the sky."

I saw no one on the road, and happily hurried down to the brook, completely hidden from the road by the tall grass. I lay down in the grass and looked up at the sky, a beautiful cloudless blue sky.

The cool earth felt good. I sailed my boat down the stream, running along the bank and scooping it out before it went too far. I saw a little brown rabbit and chased it for awhile. It was so peaceful here, undisturbed by voices or sadness. I was alone with just myself, my little boat and the beauty of the valley.

I was lying in the grass when I heard footsteps. I jumped up, panicked, and stood face to face with Manya. There she was, the girl I had thought about so much, dreamed about, loved, played games with, cried with--and, most recently, hated. I blamed Manya for all the pain from her father's beating, for all the terrible things her people had done to the Jews. Manya was like the rest of them--mean, cruel, stupid people. I was very upset at seeing her here.

"Hellow, Imic," she said gently, dropping to the ground. "I've missed you."

"Go away, Manya," I said firmly, hoping she didn't hear the crack in my voice and my heart pounding. "I don't want ever to see you again," I continued, still not daring to look at her.

"Imic, what have I done?" she asked with a terrible hurt in her voice.

"You are just like all the rest. They beat us, call us names, spit on us, kill us." I felt great anger. "Your father beat me, kicked me, dragged me over rocks because of his stupid pig. He cursed me with every name he could think of--animal, filthy Jew." I blamed Manya for the boys with the rocks. I accused her of giving them the picture I had made for her. When my furious rush of words was finished, I felt empty inside, yet almost clean. I looked down at her. She was sobbing, her hands over her face.

"Imic," she said, crying, "I'm not like the others. I care about you. The others say terrible things about the Jews, but I don't. I didn't give that picture to those boys. I was looking at it and they ran up and asked to see it. I said no, that someone had given it to me. They grabbed it. I tried to get it back. It tore in half. Then they demanded to know who Imic was. I wouldn't tell them, Imic. The biggest one grabbed my arm and twisted it behind my back, and then he threw me to the ground. The others said they would do terrible things to me, things I can't even talk about, if I didn't tell them who had made the picture for me. I didn't want to tell them, Imic," she started to cry, "but I was afraid. They're the meanest boys in town."

I was beginning to feel sick inside at the things I had said to her. I sat down, very careful not to sit too close to her or to touch her. My heart felt as if it were being ripped in half--one half wanted to put my arms around Manya and wipe the tears away, the other half felt the hurt and pain her father and others like him had caused in my life.

She spoke again, this time with more control. "When I found out that my father had beat you because the pig was lost, I went to him and told him that I had made you leave the pig. I told him you were my friend and a good person. I begged him to listen to me. He got very angry. I had never seen him like that before." Her eyes were full of fear as she ~~was~~ told the story. "Then he shouted that I was no better than the Jews, and I was an animal too, and that he no longer wanted me for a daughter. He took out a leather strap and beat me until I fainted.

Finally my mother pulled him off me. When I woke up they were screaming at each other and my whole body was cut and bleeding. He wouldn't let my mother call a doctor, but he did promise to never lay a hand on me again. He has not touched me since that day, but he still looks at me with hate and disgust. I don't care, because I hate him too." She finished her story and looked straight in my eyes. "Please, Imic, don't you hate me too."

I moved closer to her and put my arm around her small shoulders and pulled her very close to me. She came willingly and buried her face in the curve of my arm. I could smell the fresh flowers around us--like the smell of her blonde hair touching my face. We sat for a long time, close together, crying and holding each other.

I was so confused. Sometimes I felt like a very little boy who wanted to be carried by his father and protected by his mother, and other times I felt grown up, wanting to protect someone else--someone smaller than I was, someone like Manya .

She sat up and brushed her hair from her face and wiped her tears away. She was so beautiful. Her skin was as light as mine was dark, and her hair the color of the sun at noon. Her eyes were very blue, especially with the tears still glistening on her eyelashes.

"I'm sorry, Manya," I said feebly. "I really didn't mean all those terrible things I said before. I was blaming you for all the bad things other people have done. I'll never do that again." I kissed her gently. Then, feeling embarrassed, I said, "Come, let's go and sail my boat."

We both jumped up and happily ran down to the brook to play with my boat. Manya and I together, playiing together again. Manya, my friend, my best friend--we were laughing and talking together again.

I looked at the sky, saw the sun high in the sky, and knew it was time to leave. "Manya, I have to go now," I said. "When will I see you again?"

"Next Sunday, Imic," she replied. "I'll meet you here next Sunday early in the morning. But before you go away I have something to tell you. I followed you here today to tell you, but when you got so mad at me, I forgot about it." I waited. A look of sadness suddenly erased the joy from her face.

"It's my father. Some men from town came to our house last night and asked him to be the new sheriff of Sumeuka. He agreed. I was hiding in the secret place in the living room so they didn't see me. They talked about the Jews and what had happened in the market square. They were planning something terrible for the Jews, but I couldn't hear all of it. I'm scared that you'll be hurt again by my father, especially now that he's sheriff. I'll try and find out what they're going to do and warn you if I can," she finished.

"Manya," I began, "don't let your father know you have told me any of this. He'll beat you again. Thank you for telling me." I was trying to sound very brave, but my knees were shaking. "Go home now," I said firmly. "I'll see you next Sunday." I waited until Manya was out of sight before I left the valley for home.

"Well, Imic, you're a good boy--you're right on time," my mother said. "Wash your face and hands and let us eat." I did as I was told and sat down for lunch.

"What did you do in the valley?" my father asked. "Did you see anyone on the road?"

I looked down at my plate and answered quickly between bites. "No, Papa, I didn't see anyone on the road. I just sailed my boat and lay in the grass."

I had never lied to my father before. I felt very guilty. But I knew I couldn't tell him about Manya. Someday I would, but notnow. Besides I hadn't seen anyone on the road. Maybe that was what Mama meant when she told me the day we saw the partisans: Sometimes you have to tell a lie to keep others from getting hurt.

THE SECRET

The days went by uneventfully. I did not think of a way to tell my father about Manya's warning to me.

The second time we met, I asked her if she had heard any more about what her father and the Germans were planning. She had heard nothing. I felt relieved. Maybe they had decided to leave us alone.

The weather was getting colder, and soon it woud snow. Many of the gold and red leaves had fallen to the ground, and the tall grass, once so green, was turning brown. The wind had turned cold and we had to wear warmer clothes.

One week, each night after dinner was eaten and everything cleaned up, I would get into my bed and write. Sunday was Manya's birthday. I had no money to buy her a gift, so I decided to write a poem for her. I could write only a few lines each evening, but I would think about them during the long hours in the field.

As I climbed into bed with my paper and pencil that night, my mother asked, "What are you writing, Imic? I've seen you doing it for the last five or six nights. You must be writing a book," she laughed. "Our son, an author," she said affectionately to my father.

"I've been watching," my father replied. "It's good that he's learned to read and write and that he enjoys practicing his writing. Someday he might write a book." I was relieved they didn't ask to see what I had written.

I continued the poem, crossing out lines and redoing them until I had it just the way I wanted it. I very carefully copied it over in my neatest handwriting and folded the paper and placed it under my blanket. It was written in Russian, and I hoped that the words were right.

I awoke early the next morning. It was Sunday. I ran through the yard and darted across the road and down to the bottom of the valley by the brook. I checked my pocket to be certain the poem was still there. Feeling satisfied, I sat down to wait for Manya. I didn't have to wait long. I jumped up to wave to her--but something was wrong. Usually she came running and skipping to the valley. Today she was walking very slowly, her eyes to the ground. When she reached me she sat down quietly beside me.

"Happy birthday, Manya," I said quickly, anxious to give her the poem. "I had no money to buy you a present so I wrote something for you. Shall I read it to you?" I asked, trying not to notice her sadness. She nodded and I began the poem I had worked on so hard for the whole week.

"To Manya," I began. "Today is your birthday, and for you I wanted to buy fine silk for a dress or a star from the sky or a piece of bright ribbon for your beautiful hair, or a veil of white lace for your skin so fair. But all I have to give you on this special day is a wish that our happiness will always stay in our special place, this valley of green where there are no voices of hate and people aren't mean."

I finished the poem and felt somewhat embarrassed. I handed the paper to her and waited for her to speak. "Oh, Imic," she said. "It's the most wonderful present I've ever had. I'll keep it always and never show it to anyone," she promised with a smile.

"You liked it?" I asked doubting. "It wasn't that good."

"I think it is," she said. Neither of us spoke for awhile. Then she said slowly, "Imic, I have some very bad news for you. I wanted to tell you when I got here, but you were so happy I couldn't."

"What is it, Manya?" I asked, thoroughly frightened.

"It's about your father, Imic," she continued. "I was in my secret place last evening when my father and a German Army officer came into the room. I slid back the piece of wood when I heard footsteps. I saw the shiny boots and knew it was a soldier. 'I'll expect your full cooperation in this matter,' the soldier said. My father answered, 'You can count on me as the sheriff of Sumeuka to help you at all costs. When do you move the filthy bastards out?'" Manya winced.

"Go on, Manya, don't leave anything out."

"'We'll move the men out early Monday morning. No one can know about this. Are we alone here?' the soldier asked. 'Yes. Speak freely. My wife is at the market and my daughter must be outside. Please go on,' my father said.

"I was very frightened, Imic," Manya said. "If my father had discovered me I don't know what he would have done. I sat very still and was afraid to breathe or move. Then the soldier said, 'We'll take them several hundred miles from here by truck to where some of our bridges have been destroyed. The Jews will rebuild the bridges so our supply trains can get through.'"

"But Manya," I said, "your father is a Russian. Why would he help the Germans when they're fighting his own people?"

"My father is an evil man," Manya answered sadly. "For a long time now the Germans have been paying him to tell things about his own people. Now that the Germans have him as sheriff they are paying him even more. It makes me sick to think about it."

"How do you know about the money, Manya?"

"I didn't know until a little while ago. One day I was in the cellar with mother to get some blankets that she had stored there. I saw a small metal box under a pile of wood near the back of the cellar. I pulled it out and opened it, and inside were beautiful gold coins and some jewelry. I asked my mother about it and suddenly she began to cry. She told me that my father had been buying the coins and jewelry with the money the Germans gave him for reporting people who were disloyal to the German Army. I got very upset. I asked how my father could do that and how she could just sit by and let him be a traitor. She told me she was afraid of him. Once he had beaten her for asking questions. Since then she tried not to notice. I put the box back under the woodpile." She finished her story with pain on her face.

"Oh, Manya," I cried. "What can I do? I must tell my father. But I'm afraid. He doesn't know anything about you. What will we do?" My thoughts were racing in my head. I would have to tell my father that the next morning the German soldiers were coming to take him away.

"Manya, I must go. I am going home to tell my father. I can't let him go with the Germans without telling him what I know. Oh, how I wish I had never heard the news. But I had to know and you had to tell me. I'm sorry for ruining your birthday, Manya."

I raced home. As I arrived it began to snow. The flakes were getting larger and larger and were beginning to cover the ground. By nightfall the whole town would be covered by a white blanket. The snow would make it harder for my father. He had so few warm clothes and the weather would get colder the farther they tood him.

My parents were huddled around the stove in the kitchen. I looked at my father, really looked at him. Suddenly he seemed very old. His face was thin and his beard looked scraggly. His once-thick hair had begun to thin, and his hands were calloused and wrinkled.

I too felt old. I would have to grow up and be a man and tell my father about the soldier.

"Well, Imic," my father said brightly, "come over to the stove and warm yourself. The snow is falling very fast. It won't be long before our work in the fields is over. I wonder what they'll do to us now?" "They" always meant the German soldiers. I opened my mouth to speak, but no words came out. I closed my mouth quickly.

My mother was speaking. "Perhaps we will be sent back to the camp."

"No, Chava," Mrs. Abrams said. "They're keeping only the old people there--to die. Surely they wouldn't send us back."

"No, I don't think so either," said Mr. Jacobs. "I've heard that the women and children are to be put to work in the ammunitions factory in Sumeuka and the men will work on the heavy military machinery. At any rate, I don't think the German Army will last much longer. I hear that the partisans have blown up most of the bridges and cut off their supply trains."

Now, I thought, I should tell them now. But my parents wouldn't like others to know that I had disobeyed them. No, now was not the time.

The conversation continued, each guess wilder than the other, and I was the only one who could stop the guessing.

I went to bed very early and tried to sleep. If I could go to sleep then I wouldn't have to think any more. I looked out the window and the snow was falling very fast. By morning there would be several inches. I was beginning to feel sick. My stomach felt like it was turning round and round. My head was pounding and in my throat was a lump so big I could barely swallow. I began to vomit, long retching heaves.

My mother came in. She put a cool cloth on my forehead and a cloth-wrapped hot brick on my stomach. "It must be the winter flu ," she said to my father. "A few days in bed with a lot of liquids will help," my mother said matter-of-factly and patted my head.

I lay very still in my bed after my parents had turned down the light and were both sound asleep. Each time I closed my eyes, I would see the guards taking my father and the other men away, everyone thinking he would be killed. My mother and the other women would be crying. The Germans wouldn't tell the men where they were going. For all anyone would know, they were going to be killed. Then I knew. I couldn't let my mother go through another day of torture like the one we had gone through before.

With grim determination, I leaned over to my father's bed and gently shook his shoulder. "Wake up, Papa," I said, "I have something to tell you." My father stirred in his sleep and turned over.

"Please, Papa," I begged, "please wake up." He heard me this time and sat straight up.

"What is it, Imic? Are you sick again?" he asked.

"No, Papa," I said in a strong voice, "I'm not sick. I have something to tell you."

"Let it wait until morning, Imic, I'm very tired," he said.

"No, Father," I said in my most firm-sounding voice. "This can't wait until morning."

"All right, Imic, what is it?"

The whole story poured from me. I told him everything, from making the picture to the rock throwing. I told him how I planned to get that job watching the pig so I could be with Manya. I left nothing out. I went on and on. All my feelings, even how I felt when I kissed her and held her close to me.

In the dark we sat. I talked; he listened. He didn't say a word. When I finished my confession, light was beginning to come through the window.

"Well, Father," I said, "what are you going to do to me?"

"Imic," he said, "I am very pleased that you were honest with me. I am unhappy that you've been seeing the girl, but it was a brave thing she did. You are also brave to tell me the truth. I will not punish you." That was all.

I could hear Papa waking Mama to tell her what was coming. I could barely hear what he was saying. Once I heard her voice: "Oh, no, oh my God."

The light was coming in now. It was daylight--the darkness was over. Completely dressed in his warmest clothes, my father was waking the others to tell them what was going to happen. Soon we heart it.

"Attention Jews, all men will report to the marketplace in one hour. Anyone not following this order will be shot." The loudspeaker sounded over and over, repeating its gruesome message.

My mother and father held each other for a long time, both crying. "Imic," my father said in a faraway voice, "you are now the man in the house. You must be very strong and take care of your mother and the other women. You must not see Manya again. It could bring your mother great danger if her father found out about you."

"I understand, Father," I said solemnly. "I will try to do my best while you are gone." I reached up and pulled his face to mine and whispered, "I love you. Please come back soon." I stood very straight and held my mother's hand as he walked quietly out of the door into the snowy dawn.

TENSION

After my father left us, joy and happiness left our house too. The women would talk of times gone by and how things used to be before the war. I was very lonely. I had no one to talk to since I didn't see Manya any more. My mother tried to be cheerful around me and occasionally she would help me with my reading and mathematics, but after a short time she became very depressed and silent.

We could no longer work in the fields. There was a heavy layer of snow everywhere. The snow continued day after day. Very often we saw no sun. The farm no longer supplied us and our food supply was running low. The few vegetables preserved from the garden were all we had. It seemed that I was always hungry.

I remembered my promise to my father to be strong and to be the man of the house. I tried to cheer the others, but soon I too had nothing to say. Day in and day out, we would sit in our little house huddled around the big oven to keep warm. All sence of time seemed lost. The woman complained about everything. Sometimes I would just put my hands over my ears to keep from hearing them.

We stopped eating three meals a day. Only a slice of bread in the morning and some potatoes or a vegetable with a little tea late in the afternoon. We went to bed early so we wouldn't feel the hunger pains.

One night I was so hungry that my stomach started making noises and then began to hurt. I kept telling myself that I wasn't hungry, but I was. If only I had a piece of bread. Then I could sleep. Just one little piece.

My mother and the other women had worked out a rationing system so that everyone got the same amount of food each day. I knew it was wrong, but I had to have something to eat. I crept from my bed and went to the shelf where the bread was kept. As I reached up to get the bread, I knocked over a pan. It crashed to the floor. I quickly stuffed the bread into my mouth. Suddenly Mrs. Jacobs and Mrs. Abrams were standing in the kitchen in their nightclothes. They had a candle and were looking straight at my filled mouth. My mother had awakened and was standing beside me. The two women glared at me with a look in their eyes that I had never seen before.

"So, Imic, is this what has been happening to our food?" Mrs. Jacobs asked angrily. "We are all starving and you're filling yourself each night?"

"You're just an ungrateful, spoiled child," Mrs. Abrams began. "You would let us starve so that you could be full."

"But," I stammered, "I was so hungry. I just ate a little piece. I'm sorry. I've never taken food before." I was crying now and very upset.

Suddenly my mother came alive. Her eyes were flashing, but her voice was very firm and controlled. "You have no right to accuse my son. He is only a child and meant no harm. You will never speak to him that way again. Imic may have my share if he is hungry," she finished. The two women muttered something that I couldn't hear and left the room.

"I'm sorry, Mother," I began, "I didn't mean to cause trouble."

"Never mind, Imic," she replied. "One thing is very certain now.

We must leave here, you and I."

"But where will we go, Mama?" I asked fearfully.

"I don't know, Imic. Perhaps your grandfather can arrange for us to go and stay with them. I can't say what will happen to us if we stay here. Now go to sleep and we will talk again tomorrow." She sighed and climbed into bed. I fell asleep. When I awoke very early the nedt morning, my mother was gone.

My first reaction was one of panic. First my father had been taken away and now my mother was gone. I climbed down from my bed and went to the door. When I opened the door a freezing gust of wind hit my face and snowflakes whirled around in the air. I saw tracks in the snow leading away from the house. Just two footprints, not four, so I knew my mother was alone.

I sat down by the stove and waited. Just as the sun was coming up, I heard the door open. There stood my mother, trembling from the cold. Her lips were a thin blue line and her eyes were red from the wind. She came to the stove and stood close to the fire for a long time without speaking. She took off her thin coat and the burlap bags she had wrapped around her feet.

"Mama," I cried, "where did you go? Are you all right?"

"Yes, Imic, I'm all right. Keep your voice down so you don't wake the others," she cautioned, putting her finger to her lips. "I went to see the farmer we worked for and asked him to help us. I told him we had no food, that you were very sick, and if you didn't get food and a doctor that you might die."

"Oh, Mama, but that's not true."

"Hush, Imic," she said irritably. "I know it's not true. But when one is in danger of starvation one has to do many things that aren't right. I knew if I told him you were sick, he would help."

"What did you ask him to do?" I questioned.

She replied, "I told him I wanted to go and live with grandfather since I could help in the shop just as easily as work in the fields. I asked him to speak to the sheriff on our behalf. The Army still needs wagons and most of the men who worked with grandfather were sent away. He said he would speak to the sheriff and to a German officer he knows very well. He wasn't sure they would agree, but he said he would try," she said. "So now all we have to do is wait."

"What about Mrs. Jacobs and Mrs. Abrams?" I asked.

"If we leave, they must not know where we have gone. There would only be trouble. Remember what I said about doing things sometimes that you don't want to do? Well, this is one of those times. Besides, with us gone, there will be more food for them." She sighed as if already confident that we were leaving.

Two days went by and we heard nothing. The tension between the women and my mother was obvious. No one spoke. Everyone ate the meager food in silence and often I would see darting glances from the women to my mother and me. I tried to amuse myself by playing with my rock collection and writing stories. Some mornings I would see Manya going to school. She would ride behind her father on his horse. Very often she would look in the direction of our house, but she never waved or looked for very long.

On the third morning, I was awakened by the sound of low whispers. As I listened carefully, I realized it was my grandfather and my mother.

My mother's plan must have worked.

"Imič," my mother said softly, "get dressed in your warmest clothes and take everything that is yours. We are going to your grandfather's house. Be very quiet and don't wake the others." My mother was completely dressed and had a few sacks lined up by the door. I put on all my clothes and picked up my blanket. In the blanket I put my boat, rocks and my storeis. I bundled it up and quietly followed my mother out the door. As I was leaving I noticed a note lying by the stove. It was addressed to Mrs. Jacobs and Mrs. Abrams. It read, "We are safe. Do not worry about us. Now you will have more food." It was signed by my mother. She really did care what happend to them after all.

THE MESSAGE

Grandfather had brought a wagon to take us to his house. The sun was just coming up as we drove down the road. Everything was white and the sun made everything glitter and sparkle like diamonds. It seemed as if nothing ugly could happen here in this land of sparkling branches and white mountains of snow.

Grandmother was waiting by the door for us. She hugged us, kissed us and sat us down to eat. On the table were pancakes, hot bread and tea. "Where did you get all this food?" I marvelled.

"As long as I keep making wagons and wheels we will continue to eat," my grandfather replied disgustedly.

How he must hate having to work for the German Army, I thought.

Grandmother and grandfather told us how we were allowed to come to them. The farmer had kept his word, but instead of going to the sheriff, he had come to my grandfather to tell him of my mother's visit and all about my illness. At first my grandfather didn't believe him, but the farmer reminded him of the time he had brought my parents to see me when I was living with my grandparents.

Grandfather still didn't trust him completely. Why would the farmer want to help a Jew? The farmer told him the story of his sick little boy and how my mother had given him the onion that brought the fever down. The famer told my grandfather that he could arrange our moving in with his German officer friend, but my grandfather must agree never to tell anyone where we were. If the sheriff found us he would be very angry and very dangerous.

My grandfather also had to tell the German officer that my mother and I knew how to make wagon wheels, that he had taught my mother how to bend the metal years ago, and that I had learned while I lived with them. The officer knew how short of men my grandfather was, and also knew how badly wagons were needed. He agreed that we could come.

When my grandfather had finished his story he turned to me with a smile on his wrinkled face. "Well, Imic, I'm glad to see you are feeling better." Then he winked at me.

Life was bearable again. We had food to eat and family to be with. I still missed my father very much and thought of him every day, but now I had my grandfather to talk to and to read to. He was very impressed with my reading and writing. After dinner each night, we would sit down by the stove and work on lessons. Displeased that I had not learned more mathematics, he gave me many new problems to work on. He was very patient with me.

My mother looked better than I had seen her look for a long time. Her eyes looked less sad, and she smiled more now. She rarely spoke of my father except about what we would do when he came home. She never said "if"--only "when."

Every morning she and I would go with my grandfather to his shop so when the guards came by they would see us working. I went back to my job of sorting nails and Mama was learning how to bend the metal. We were both glad to have something to do after such a long time of just sitting in the house worrying about papa and what we were going to eat.

Sometimes I worried about Mrs. Abrams and Mrs. Jacobs, but their names were never mentioned. Most of all I thought about Manya. Many mornings I would go out and stand behind the big tree by the road. I would see her behind her father on the horse going to school. She always looked beautiful in her red coat and furry cap. Her cheeks were rosy from the cold and her eyes were very blue.

One day as I was crouched behind the tree, I saw her coming. This time she was alone. I stood up and wav-d to her. She came over to me quickly, looking all around to make sure no one saw her. "Imic, what are you doing here?" she asked, shocked to see me.

"We're living with my grandparents, Manya, but don't tell your father. No one can know we are here," I said firmly.

"I wouldn't tell him anything. Oh, Imic, I've missed you so! But I'm so glad you're all right," she said warmly. "Can't we ever play together again?"

"I don't know, Manya, " I said with pain. "Not now, but someday we'll see each other again and we can play all day," I lied, knowing that day would never come.

"I hope so, Imic," she said brightly. "I have to go now or I'll be late to school." She squeezed my hand and continued down the road.

Months went by, and our life went on uninterrupted. No one heard a word from any of the men who had been taken away.

We had few visitors, only the men who worked for grandfather. The farmer stopped by once to see how we were. He looked at me very strangely. He commented how well I looked for someone who had been near death. I smiled innocently and looked at the ground.

My Aunt Pearl was our only other visitor. She was very surprised to find us here. She lived nearby and when the snow wasn't falling she would come by to talk to my mother and grandmother. Grandfather would often give her a little food to take home.

The talk was always of the men. Aunt Pearl was sure they were all dead. My mother would always insist that they were alive. I don't think my mother really believed my father was alive, but she always insisted that he would return. I couldn't even remember what he looked like. I tried to picture him when he left our house that early morning, but all I could see was a blurry figure standing in the snow.

Finally the snow stopped and the wind got a little warmer. The snow was still firmly packed on the ground, but the skies were clear. I had lost all track of time, and when my mother told me it was March I could barely believe it. Six months since my father had left--surely he must be dead.

One day when we were all sitting around the stove after dinner, my Aunt Pearl suddenly came bursting through the door. She was waving her arms and trying to speak, but no sounds came from her mouth. She looked very white and in shock. "What is it, Pearl?" my grandfather asked. "What is the matter with you?" She kept waving her arms and pointing to her hand. It was tightly closed around a piece of paper.

"Pearl," my mother said loudly, "stop waving your arms and tell us what has happened."

Aunt Pearl finally managed to say "This," and threw the wadded piece of paper at my mother. My mother stooped down and picked it up. She read it quickly and began to cry. She ran to me and hugged me and to

Pearl and both women began crying. My grandfather grabbed the note and read it aloud.

"'Chava, I am safe. I am at Bierstad with my sister. I will be home tomorrow.'"

My father was coming home tomorrow. He was really not dead and he was coming home. By this time all of us were hugging each other and crying.

Much later after we had quieted down and Aunt Pearl had gone, I went to my mother and sat on her lap. "Mama," I said, "What will Papa be like? Will he be different now? I can't remember what he looks like."

"Oh, Imic, your papa will be the same. He may be very tired, but he will not be different. He will still love you just as he always has," she said quietly. How did she know what I had been thinking? She always knew.

We were up very early the next morning. My grandfather said it was about a four-hour walk from Bierstad and my father should arrive about noon. Suddenly I remembered something. "Mama, Mama," I called frantically. "Papa won't know where to find us. He won't know to come here." I was getting very upset.

"You're right, Imic," she said. "In all the excitement I had forgotten that. We will have to walk down the road and wait for him. Do you want to come with me?"

"Oh, yes, of course," I replied eagerly. "But what if someone sees us?" I had a sudden vision of being caught by the sheriff.

"We'll wear farmers' clothes. I still have the ones your father and I wore when we came to see you. Come, grandmother will help us," she answered.

In a very short time I looked just like the child of a Ukrainian farmer. We left the house in our strange clothes and began our journey to town. We had gotten about halfway down the road when two people on a big horse came toward us.

My heart went to my throat. I grabbed my mother's hand. It was Manya and her father. I lowered my head and we kept walking. My mother must have recognized him too because at that moment she squeezed my hand. I glanced at her from the corner of my eye and she had her head down also. As they came closer Manya's father said "Good day" in Russian. We nodded and he passed us by. We were safe.

We reached the point on the road where we were to wait and sat down on a rock.

We sat staring down the road for a long time. Every few minutes my mother would walk to the middle of the road and put her hand above her eyes to look for him. Suddenly I saw her begin to run. I jumped up and ran to catch up with her. It was him--he was coming home. He was walking slowly with a stick and he looked very old.

We ran faster and faster until we could see him clearly. It was my father. He was trying to run toward us, but he couldn't run. When we reached him his big arms encircled us and we were safe. He was alive and back with us. My tears were icy cold on my face and my father's tears were frozen on his long beard like tiny icicles. My mother looked like a young girl again, arms around my father, smiling happily.

Suddenly, the cold gray day was warm and bright. My father had come home.

THE ORDEAL

My father was very sick. After we got to my grandparents and the rounds of kisses and hugs were over, he went straight to bed.

All during the day I crept into the room to see him. He looked so different, almost like my grandfather who had died at the camp. He had a long red beard and his face too was long and thin. His hands were gnarled and old looking. Something terrible must have happened to him while he was away. He looked twenty years older. His right leg had been caught under a piece of steel and he needed a cane to walk.

On my sixth trip into the bedroom, my mother stopped me. "Let him sleep, Imic, Your father is very, very tired. He has been through a lot during the last six months. He'll want to see you when he wakes up," she said. "Are you worried that he might not wake up?"

I hung my head and replied, "You always know what I'm thinking, Mama. Are you sure he won't die?"

"Oh, Imic, of course I'm sure. If he didn't die during these long months, he certainly is not going to die now. Once he has rested and eaten, he will be fine," she said reassuringly.

I felt better and returned to the kitchen to await my father. All day and all night he slept and most of the next day. I tried to keep busy. I walked around, I read stories, I worked in the shop with grandfather. Finally, about 4:00 o'clock in the afternoon, my mother called to me. "Imic, come inside. Your father is awake and wants to see you."

I ran breathlessley into the bedroom. My father was sitting up in bed with a big tray of food in front of him. My granmother was beside him urging him to eat. "The food is so good," he was saying, "but I'm afraid I can't eat it all. I ate so little while I was away my stomach seems to have shrunk.

"Imic," he said to me, "come here, my son, and let me look at you. You have grown so tall since I last saw you. Have you been a good boy and helped your mother?"

"I have tried, Papa," I said, feeling very proud. "I tried to keep my promise to you and be strong and a man, though sometimes it was very hard."

"I know, Imic. All of us find it hard to be strong at times," he replied gently.

"Papa," I said suddenly, "tell me about what happened to you while you were gone."

"Shh! Imic," my grandmother warned. "Your father just got home. Do not ask him such questions."

"It's all right, Imic," my father said. "I want to tell you what happened. It was very bad for me, but I think you should hear it. But not now. Perhaps tomorrow when I am more rested." He finished with a sigh and turned on his side and closed his eyes.

"All right, Papa," I whispered, and we all tiptoed out of the room, closing the door behind us.

The next day was Sunday and we all slept late and had a good hot breakfast. My father was up and walking around now. "All right, Imic," my father said, "call the others and I will tell my story."

I did as I was told and soon we were all gathered around my father in the kitchen. I was sitting on the floor by his knee looking up at him.

"The morning we left Sumeuka," he began, "there were about fifty of us. I was the only one besides Jacobs and Abrams who knew where we were being taken." He paused and patted my head as if remembering how he had found out. I smiled up at him broadly. "All the others thought we were going to be shot, and they were frightened. Some were solemn and crying, others loud and pretending to be brave. The Germans loaded us into the back of two open trucks and told us to keep quiet or they would shoot. We all were covered with snow very soon. There were so many of us pushed together in the back of the truck that only the heat from our bodies kept us from freezing to death. We drove for hours in the bitter wind and snow until we reached a forest about three hundred miles from here. We could hear guns in the distance so we knew we were near the front.

"When we got out of the trucks we saw a railroad trestle that had been blown up. Another German Army truck pulled up, and soldiers got down and came toward us. They were told that we had been brought to rebuild the bridge. Those who understood German quickly told the others what we had come for, and a wave of relief swept through the men. An officer fired his pistol in the air and shouted for silence. Then he said to us: 'You have been brought here to rebuild the bridge and others like it for the victorious German Army. You will work every day until the bridges are completed. Anyone not obeying this command will immediately be shot.' We lines up single file and were marched through the woods to a clearing. One man fell. As he was getting up, a soldier shot his head off with a machine gun."

My father winced as he said this. Then he continued.

"We marched for about half an hour to the far side of the clearing. There was a low narrow trench about three feet wide and four feet deep, with a low roof over it. We stared at this trench in disbelief, unable to accept the fact that this would be our home for at least six months. When none of us moved the Germans shoved us with their rifle butts until we had all been pushed into the trench. Shivering and half frozen, we did what we could to shield ourselves from the cold and snow. None of us had warm clothes. The Germans wore heavy woolen gray coats with fur gloves, hats and heavy boots. They walked around quite comfortably. The army truck brought over a huge pot and we were given a few mouthfuls of potato soup. We didn't know then that would be our diet in the future. They marched us at gun point to the bridge site. We were given the materials to rebuild the bridge and were put to work immediately. At dark, exhausted and freezing, we were marched back to the trench. The night was unbearable. We all piled on top of one another to keep warm. Day after day, with only soup to eat, we were marched from the trench to the bridge and back again. The work on the bridge went very slowly. None of us were skilled in building and the air was so cold that when our hands touched the metal it was like getting and electric shock.

"After about five months, men began to die from cold and starvation. Each time someone died the Germans would throw his body into the clearing. Several of us would sneak out at night and dig a grave. The Germans thought that the fresh snowfall was covering the bodies.

"One night, a man named Issek, who spoke and understood German very well, said that he had heard the soldiers talking. 'It's good news for us. The Germans seem to be in some kind of trouble,' he said. 'One of the soldiers received a message from Field Headquarters saying that more men are needed at the front. The Russians are advancing rapidly and a whole battalion is needed immediately. Many of the soldiers here will have to go to the front lines. Only six will remain here,' Issek concluded. As the news moved through what was left of our men there was a great deal of excitement. Issek had a plan which he shared with several of us. 'As soon as the soldiers pull out,' he said, 'we will go to the soldiers who are left and demand better treatment. We will refuse to work unless we get better food and better shelter. They dare not kill us all because the bridge won't be finished and no supplies will be able to get through.'

"Soneone objected to Issek, 'How can we be sure that they won't shoot us and bring more Jews?' But, I said, 'That's a chance we'll have to take. The Germans are probably under orders to get the bridge finished. Besides, we outnumber them four to one.' By this time there were only twenty-five of us left," my father said.

"Early the next morning as we were working, we heard the army truck pull away with the main force. At noon when we were eating our soup, we devised our plan. As soon as the guards came to move us back to the bridge, we would make our demands. The six guards came. 'Get back to work, you dirty Jews,' came the shouted order. Issek went forward and presented our demands. We were all frightened, but we tried not to show it.

"'What do you mean you will not work?' shouted the enraged German. 'You will all be shot.' He waved his pistol in the air. Issek stood very still and the rest of us stepped up to him and formed a line. 'Then shoot us all,' Issek said. 'But if you do your bridge will not get built.' He stared straight at the German. The guard turned away and told the other soldiers standing nearby what had happened.

"We continued standing in our line, freezing, not willing to move an inch toward the bridge. After what seemed like hours, the German guard returned and called three of our men forward. As they each took a step, all three were shot. They lay dead at our feet. Then the German said, 'Now get to work.' No one moved. The German turned very red in the face. His eyes were filled with hate. But a little fear had begun to show too. 'Move,' he yelled and fired his gun into the air. We remained standing in line, staring straight ahead.

"There were more shots from behind us, and three more of our men dropped dead to the ground. That left only nineteen of us." My father covered his face with his hands and began to weep.

"That's enough for today, Velvel," my mother urged. "You can finish another time."

"No, Chava, I want to get the whole story out. I can't keep it inside anymore," my father said in a strange voice.

"We still didn't move and the Germans saw that killing us would not work. They agreed to give us what we wanted. They took us to the other side of the forest and there we saw a row of long wooden buildings that had been used by the soldiers who had left that morning. 'You will stay here,' the guard shouted with rage. 'You will get two meals a day.'

"We hadn't expected anything that good. We were overjoyed. The barracks weren't wonderful, but at least the freezing wind did not get at us at night. The food wasn't much better than the cold soup we had been getting, but at least it was warm. We went back to work on the bridge that afternoon.

"The next morning when we went into the big room for breakfast, everyone was gone--vanished. There were no Germans there. Outside the two trucks were gone. There were no tire marks--they must have left the night before and the snow had covered the tracks. We searched the entire barracks and the surrounding area. They were nowhere to be found. We all sat down in the big room to figure out what had happened.

"Issek said, 'Obviously the Germans ran away. The Russians must be getting closer and pushing the Germans back. The soldiers here must have heard that and knew they would be killed, so they ran.'

"Another man said, 'Let's get out of here. There's no one to stop us.' But several of the men thought the Germans were only hiding. One of them said, 'Where will we go? We have no idea where we are. We will be shot and killed if we try to run away.'

"Issek answered him. 'We will follow the power lines until we come to a town. Then we will find out where we are. But first we take the food from here. The Germans have left.' All of us began to ransack the makeshift kitchen. We found nothing except a few potatoes and some stale bread. We put the food into a sack and set out to find the power lines.

"We walked all day. At night we huddled together by a small fire. Six of us stood guard until dawn, but no one appeared. About three o'clock the next afternoon, we saw a power line. We began jumping up and down like small children. We followed the power lines for the next three days. By this time we were starving and half frozen, but the thought of getting home somehow kept us all alive. We saw no one along the way. I felt as if the whole world were dead and only the nineteen of us were left alive. We walked and walked. One day we found a railroad track. We followd it until we came to a small town, but it looked deserted. We saw a train and ran to it and climbed aboard. At last we were out of the cold. We were all very thin--our skin was like paper--and my leg, which I had hurt on the bridge, was hurting very badly. The train was empty, and apparently going nowhere. We slept on the train for two days. Suddenly it began to move. We did not know where we were going or even if anyone knew we were on the train. Sometime in the afternoon it pulled into a station in another town. Hundreds of soldiers were standing on the platform waiting to board the train. We recognized the uniforms of the German Army.

"Well, it's all over, I thought. We will all be shot. Fear and panic spread among us. There was nowhere to run. We were trapped. As soon as the soldiers boarded the train, we would be killed. We all turned to Issek for help. He had become our leader since that day when he made the demands on the Germans. 'Wait here for me,' he said in a controlled voice. 'Do not speak among yourselves or to anyone else. Sit very quietly and trust me.' Then he was gone. We obeyed him and stayed silent. I watched him walk off the train and straight up to a German officer. Issek must have lost his mind. Now we would be killed for sure. But very soon he returned carrying a wooden crate. He was smiling, obviously pleased with himself. He opened the crate and it was filled with food--bread, cheese, fruits--a whole crate of food. None of us had seen so much food in months. Everyone began grabbing the food and devouring it. It disappeared very quickly.

"'What happened, Issek?' I demanded, still in a state of disbelief. 'What did you tell the German?'

"'I told him that we were German P.O.W.'s who had escaped from a Russian concentration camp, and that we were starving. So he gave me this food. When he asked where we were headed, I told him we were trying to get back to Sumeuka. He said the next train was going to Bierstad, which is eighteen miles from Sumeuka. I thanked him for his help, and he wished us a safe journey.' We all sat there dumbfounded—a German officer wishing Jews a safe journey home.

"'Now,' said Issek, 'everyone follow me. We get on the next train. Speak to no one. If the Germans hear Yiddish we will be shot immediately. If you must speak, say only "Dankeschon,"—"thank you."' We were all very nervous. The soldiers standing on the platform waved and called to us to have a safe trip. We nodded and said 'Dankeschon,' and walked on to the other train. Issek spoke to the conductor in German and he agreed to help us. He believed we were Germans."

My father paused to ask for a cup of tea. We all sat in silent amazement, waiting to hear more of his almost unbelievable story. After a few sips of the tea he continued.

"We rode for two days and two nights. On the third day we arrived in Bierstad. During our trip Issek had told his story to other Germans on the train and they had given us food because they felt so sorry for us. At first it made me feel sick for anyone to think I was a German, but after awhile I was almost glad to be taking food from them. They had taken everything from us." My father's eyes were suddenly filled with hate. "They are cruel, inhuman machines who care nothing for mankind. They only want to kill and destroy anyone who is not German." HE paused a moment, and then went on. "We got off the train in Bierstad, weary from the trip, and welcomed the cold, fresh air. We were only eighteen miles from Sumeuka, our homes and families. We were all anxious to get on with our journey.

"As we were walking, I heard a voice yelling 'Hersch, Hersch.' An old woman came rumming up to me and threw her arms around me. I was astonished, but after a closer look, she seemed vaguely familiar. 'Hersch, you are alive, you are alive,' she repeated over and over. 'I am Hersch's son, Velvel,' I said quietly. 'My father died some time ago.'

-It was my Aunt Sarah. "What are you doing here in Bierstad?' she ten asked. 'We are on our way to Sumeuka and our families,' I replied, pointing to the other men who were waiting for me.

"'You must stay here tonight,' she said. 'Your sisters, Golda and Rachel, are living with me.' 'My sisters--I thought they were dead. I do want to see them' I said in great excitement. I told Issek and the others to go ahead. I would come tomorrow. I wanted to stay the night with my sisters. We embraced each other and off they went down the road.

"I went home with Aunt Sarah and was reunited with Rachel and Golda. How wonderful it was to see them alive. They didn't have much food and looked old and tired, but they were well. They both work in a factory making uniforms for the German Army. One of the workers there, a Ukrainian, had become their fried. He was going to Sumeuka that night so Golda asked him to carry a note to Pearl.

"And that is the end of my story," he finished with a sigh.

We were all silent for a long. time. His story was amazing. But his pain was very great.

"And the others," he said suddenly, "when did they arrive?"

"I have heard nothing of the others," my grandfather said with alarm. "None of the men returned to the shop today. Was Yankel killed?"

"No, he was one of the eighteen who came ahead of me," my father said. "Maybe the snow held them up--although I'l afraid something must have happened to them, because they were very anxious to return home. Maybe we'll hear something tomorrow. But they should have been here four days ago."

My grandfather decided to go to the village to see if he could get any information. Several hours later he came back. His face was the color of ashes and the tears stremed from his eyes. My father grabbed him by the shoulders and demanded to know the news. In a shaking, frightened voice my grandfather said, "They are all dead--shot just two miles from Sumeuka. Their bodies were found piled together this morning with bullet holes through their heads."

My father sat down, slowly, put his hands to his face and began to sob violently--great racking sobs. Soon we were all crying with him.

GOODBYE

The snow had stopped falling, and I spent more time outside. The ground was frozen solid and I could run very fast and slide for a long time. Grandfather came in early one morning to wake me.

"Good morning, Grandfather," I said sleepily. "Is it time to get up?"

"Yes, sleepyhead," he replied. "The sun is up and I have a surprise for you."

I jumped up excitedly. "What is it?" I notice him holding something behind his back.

"These are for you," he said, and held out a pair of ice skates.

"Oh, Grandfather," I squealed, "skates?" I grabbed him by the neck and hugged him. "Where did you get them?"

"That's my secret," he said. "Try them on."

I put the skates on. They fit perfectly. Immediately after breakfast, I put them on again and went outside. The ground was just like a frozen lake. I was a little wobbly because I had not skated since we left Brichen and I fell down many times. But each time I got up and tried again, and by lunchtime I was not falling down quite as often.

I sat down to catch my breath and saw Manya coming down the road, swinging her books. I turned toward the house to see if anyone was watching. No one was in sight. I skated quickly to the fence by the road.

"Manya," I said, "look at my new skates. Aren't they beautiful?"

"Yes, Imic," she said with a faraway look in her eyes. "They're very nice. You're lucky to have them. Soon you will have everything you want." She began to cry. The tears made her wonderful face look ugly.

"Manya, what's wrong? What do you mean, soon I'll have whatever I want?"

Just then I heard my grandmother's voice. "Imic, Imic, come in to eat."

"I have to go, Manya," I said hurriedly.

"Meet me at our valley on Sunday," she called as she ran down the road. I did not have time to answer her, but she knew I would be there.

On Sunday morning I awoke very early, put my skates on and started for the valley. It did not take me long to get there.

How different the valley looked. The trees were bare and covered with ice and snow. The green tall grass was gone and the small brook, where I had so often sailed my little boat, was frozen solid and easily seen from the road. The morning sun was behind a big gray cloud and it was very cold there. I shivered and waited for Manya. In a few minutes I saw her coming, slowly, very carefully so she would not lose her balance coming down the hill. She was carrying a blanket and a notebook.

"Hello, Imic," she said solemnly. "Come, let us go over by the trees where no one can see us."

I followed her willingly. She led me into a thick clump of trees. We could no longer see the road. She spread the blanket on the cold ground. I sat down next to her and waited anxiously for her to speak.

"Imic, I have come to say goodbye to you."

I interrupted her. "Goodbye," I said in alarm. "Where am I going?"

She put her finger to her lips, signalling me to be quiet. "It's not you who's going away, it's me." She began to cry softly.

"But where, Manya? This is your home, you have lived here since you were born. Your father is the sheriff, why are you leaving?"

"I know all that, Imic," she cried. "But now it's me and my family who are in trouble and you will soon be free." She stopped and hung her head.

"Manya," I said in confusion, "please tell me what you are talking about."

"It's very simple, Imic. The Russians are coming and the Germans will be captured. Since my father has been helping the Germans, he will be made a prisoner too. That's why we're leaving," she said.

"Running away?" I asked.

"Yes, Imic, we are running away--to Germany so the Russians can't find us," she said.

"When, Manya?" I asked. "And how did you find this out?"

"I've known for several days. I heard my father talking witha German soldier. The Germans are helping us escape. So now, Imic, you will be free at long last. I am glad for you," she said with tears in her eyes. "We are leaving early in the morning before the sun comes up. I will miss you, Imic. Someday we will see each other when we both are free."

"Oh, Manya," I said, "that is terrible for you." I couldn't believe what she was saying. We would be free--all the Jews who had been slaves and prisoners, free.

"What if the Russians don't get the Germans out of Sumeuka? What if the Germans win?" I asked.

"My father says there is no chance of that, Imic. He says the Germans are losing every battle. Many soldiers are running away to Germany to keep from being killed by the Russians, and we have to go with them." She sighed and fell silent.

I could not think of anything to say. I reached out and took her hand. "You will always be my best friend, Manya. No matter what happens," I whispered.

She smiled a half smile and handed me the book she had brought with her. "I want you to have this, Imic, to remember me. Please keep it always. Whenever you look at it, think of me," she said. I started to open the loosely bound book, but she stopped me. "No, Imic, not here. Wait until I'm gone," she said quietly.

We sat and looked at each other for a long time, and finally Manya broke the silence. "I must go now, Imic. Please remember me. I shall miss you." She leaned over and kissed me. Her lips were icy cold on my cheek, and her tears left a mark on my face. She ran away quickly. I was alone.

I walked slowly out of the valley, thinking what Manya had told me. Free, we were going to be free--was it true? She had said soon. What did that mean?

Suddenly I remembered the book I was carrying. I opened it.

There were many poems and stories in Manya's handwriting. I didn't take time to read them because my head was too full of thoughts of freedom. I skated home quickly and hid the book under my bed.

FREEDOM--FOR A WHILE

"Imic, where have you been this morning?" my mother asked. "We were worried about you. You must not leave here again alone."

"I'm sorry, Mama," I said, only half listening. "I have news. Call Papa and grandmother and grandfather," I said, feeling very important. After I said it, I realized I would have to tell them where I had heard the news. Well, it was too late to worry about that.

"What are you talking about, Imic?" my mother asked skeptically. "What news?"

"Please, Mama," I urged. "Let's go find Papa, grandmother and grandfather." I led the way into the kitchen and found the others sitting around the stove warming themselves.

"Well, Imic," my father began, "did you have fun skating?"

"Yes, Papa, but I have news to tell you," I said with urgency.

"Oh, what's that?" my father said in a half teasing way.

"We are going to be freed by the Russians soon," I blurted out. "They are coming and they will kill the Germans and let us go."

"And when is this all going to occur?" my grandfather asked, only half seriously.

"Imic, you have such an imagination, now where did you hear such things?" my mother asked.

No one believed me, my parents or my grandfather. I began to cry in frustration. "Imic," my grandmother said, "I believe you. Now dry your eyes and tell us everything." I told everything I knew except where I had gotten the information.

"Now, Imic, where did all this news come from?" my father insisted

My face clouded and I didn't answer. "Well, Imic?" he repeated.

"Please, Papa, I can't tell you. I promised not to tell. Please don't make me tell," I pleaded. Everyone was silent and looked at me in surprise. Slowly my father said, "All right, Imic, I will respect your decision not to tell where you heard." I ran to him and hugged him. "What was that for?" he asked.

I looked up at him and said, "Just because."

We began to hear rumors of the Russians coming. No one knew exactly which of these storiies were true, but things slowly became different. The Germans stopped coming to grandfather's house to check on the men in the shop. We heard of no more killings of Jews in our town. The farmers who worked the collective no longer came to the farm office to make their reports. Many people who, like Manya's father, had worked with the Germans, suddenly disappeared.

Each time I thought of Manya and our last meeting in the valley, I felt a sense of emptiness. I treasured the book of poems and stories she had given me. Often, when no one was around, I would bring the book from its hiding place and read it. I had memorized most of what she had written. I especially like the poem from the day her father had beaten me for losing his pig. The words seem to stick in my mind:

"Dear Imic, child of war
Bruised and beaten, and in pain you are
Hated by man, loved by few
And only because you were born a Jew.
Someday you will be free and well
And then such stories you can tell.
Remember me as one who cared
And remember the friendship we both shared."

"Free and well." Even then Manya had hoped that I would be free. She was truly my best friend.

One night I had a dream. I was much older, almost a man, and I was walking down a street in a faraway place, some place I had never seen before, and there was a lot of water there and a big ship. I was getting on the ship, and I heard a voice calling my name. When I turned around I saw a girl waving at me. She was very tall and blonde and very pretty. I knew immediately that it was Manya.

At that point in my dream I was awakened by a loud crashing noise. I thought it was thunder, but the noise kept sounding over and over. It wasn't thunder, it was gun shots. I leaped from my little bed in the corner of the room and ran to my parents' bed. They were awake and I climbed in beside them.

My father said, "It must be the Russians; quickly, both of you get down on the floor." My mother and I did as we were told and my father ran from the room to get my grandparetns. Soon all of us were lying on the floor of the bedroom, trembling with fear and excitement. Suddenly we heard a loud piercing siren sound in the direction of the town.

We lay in this position for a long time, listening to the shots. They sounded very near us. After awhile there was silence.

"The Russians will be coming here soon," my grandfather said. "We are close to the farm headquarters and the truck depot. The Russians will want to get the army vehicles." We lay very still on the floor, waiting for some unknown thing to happen.

The morning light was just coming in the windows. I wanted very badly to look outside. My parents and grandparents were deep in conversation about what was going on. I began to inch my way over to the window. I got up on my knees and looked out. There were many men running around the shop and yard with guns in their hands. I could tell by their uniforms that they were not Germans.

Suddenly I saw a German soldier run out of the shop. The Russians shot him and he fell dead just below the window. I jumped back and ran to my parents. "They are all here," I screamed, "everywhere. I just saw a German soldier get shot. I'm frightened, Papa."

"Imic, stay here. Don't move, and we'll be all right," he said sternly.

"What if the Germans come inside?" I asked, near hysteria now. "They will kill us all."

"Quiet, Imic," my grandfather said harshly. "Keep still."

We lay on the floor all through the morning listening and waiting. We heard several shots and the sound of people running, screams in the distance. Sometime in the late afternoon, silence fell. For several hours we heard nothing, no shots, no screams, no sound of heavy footsteps.

My father got up and stiffly walked to the window. He returned to us, shaking his head. "They are dead, all over the place, dead Germans. Their pockets have been looted and their weapons and boots taken. Chava," he said to my mother, "pack me some food. Come," he said to my grandfather, "let us go to town and see what has happened."

"No, Velvel," my mother said. "It is too dangerous. You may be shot." I knew my father would go, no matter what my mother said.

My mother was crying softly as my father and grandfather left the house. I went to her and put my arms around her. "Don't worry, Mama, Papa will return. Please don't cry. Everything is going to be all right."

"Oh, Imic," my mother hugged me. "You are a brave boy."

No one spoke much that afternoon. Mama and grandmother prepared a late supper, and we had just sat down to eat when we heard my father and grandfather coming in the house. The look on their faces was of great excitement and relief. My mother ran to them both, threw her arms around them, saying over and over, "You're safe, you're safe."

My father told us what they had seen. "All the way to the marketplace we saw German soldiers dead along the road. Many farmers were riding their wagons into town to see what had happened. When we reached the marketplace it was packed with people. Russians everywhere and more coming. Many were crossing the Bugg River in barrels. The Russian flag had been raised over the town. Victory celebrations are going on everywhere. The Germans who were captured had been taken away to prison. We were standing by the fountain in the market when a Russian officer approached us. 'Are you a Russian?' he asked me. 'No,' I answered, we are Jews.' 'Jews,' the soldier repeated. 'Have you been here long?' 'Yes,' I replied. 'The Germans have had us working as slaves on the collective farms.' The Russian officer looked very distressed at this. 'We have not come across any Jews on our way,' he said. 'How many of you are here in Sumeuka?' 'Not many are left,' I said. I told him about the men who had been shot and about the ones who had frozen to death building the bridge.

"He seemed very interested in this information. He walked to the loudspeaker that had been set up in the square and announced, 'All Jews in the town of Sumeuka and surrounding areas will now be free.' There was a slight murmur from the crowd, and thensilence.

"The soldier returned to where I was standing and asked what our trades had been. I told him butcher and--wagon-wheel maker. A practical trade would be needed now, I knew. 'We are hungry,' the Russian said to me. 'My men have not had meat in a long time. We will get a cow and you will butcher it for us. You may take some of the meat for yourself. Be here at nine tomorrow morning. And now, old man, you can stay here in Sumeuka, if you like, and continue your wagon-wheel business. You will be paid very well.' But we both then explained that we would rather go home. 'As you wish,' the soldier said, and walked away.

"It seems we can leave here shortly and go back to Brichen."

At that we all began to shout and cheer. "Oh, Velvel," my mother cried, "how wonderful--to be free again and to go home. I never thought this day would come. When can we leave?"

"Probably in another few days," my father replied, happiness in his voice. "First I will butcher the cow for the Russians and then we can begin our way back."

My father went into town the next morning and the Russians took him to butcher the cow. When he had finished, he was given some of the less desirable pieces of meat to take with him. What a feast we had that night.

Thenews of the Jews' freedom had spread throughout the village, and soon all the people we had known in the camp, and others, began to gather at my grandfather's house. How old and tired they looked--thin, frightening faces, bony bodies, wrinkled skin. I could hardly believe these were the same people we had left Brichen with so long ago. Everyone was excited and happy and talked a lot about going home. The Jews began to prepare to leave.

ANOTHER FAREWELL

On the third day of our new freedom, a Russian soldier on horseback came to our house early in the morning. "All Jews will meet at the town square at eleven o'clock," he shouted, and then rode on to tell others. "Oh, no," my grandmother said. "What now? What will become of us now?"

We were all frightened, and I began to imagine terrible things. I was crying and couldn't stop. "Papa," I cried frantically, "please don't let them hurt us. What do they want with us? I thought we were going to be free."

"Quiet, Imic," he replied. "I don't know the answers to your questions. We will do as we are told."

At 11:00 we were all assembled in the town square. I noticed how few children were there. There had been many more at the camp when I had left. I guessed that they were dead, all of them. A darkly deep and lonely feeling crept over me as I stood watching the Jews around me.

[illegible]

At one time there had been 750 Jews in Sumeuka. Only a few were left. I tried to count. Seventy-five people were standing in the Sumeuka town square. "Dear God," I said quietly, "don't let them kill my Papa."

The Russian officer raised his hand for silence. No guns, no shouts. There was immediate quiet. He began to speak. "The Russian Army needs men to continue the war against Germany. All men between the ages of fourteen and fifty-five will become soldiers in the Russian Army. You will be treated the same as the Russian soldiers. You will not be tortured. We will leave tomorrow morning at seven o'clodk to fight in the East."

"Oh, Papa, you have to go away again." I cried and clung to him.

Only thirty men between the ages of 14 and 55 were left in Sumeuka. Many of those were sick and couldn't walk very well.

When we arrived at our house, my father tried to be cheerful. "You'll see, Imic, I will be at home with you in Brichen before you even know it." I was too sad to be cheered.

"Oh, Papa, what if you get killed?" I cried.

"Stop it, Imic," my mother said. "We are all upset about Velvel's leaving, but we must not be sad on his last night. God will protect him, and he will return safely to us." My mother sounded just like my grandfather.

My grandfather picked me up and whispered gently, "Be brave, Imic, and wish your father well."

"Do you have to go too, Grandfather?" I asked in fear.

"No, Imic, I am much too old for the army. I will take care of you, your mother and grandmother until your father comes back," he said.

Early the next morning, we all went with my father to the town square. There we were joined by the others. Soon every eligible man had been issued a new uniform, a shiny pair of boots and a great long coat. I was very impressed by the uniform, and very proud that my father would wear it. The men were told to get into army trucks, and I knew that this was goodbye to my father for a while.

I ran to him and he lifted me up high. "Goodbye, Papa, I shall miss you terribly, but kill lots of Germans so you can come home soon," I said and hugged him hard.

"Take care of yourself, Imic, I will miss you too." His eyes were shining with tears. He embraced my mother for a long time, and then he was gone. We stood in the town square, waving until the trucks were out of sight. Slowly we turned to go home.

We prepared to leave Sumeuka. We put our few belongings in burlap bags. I packed my few special treasures, first my little boat, then my ice skates, my rock collection, and finally the book that Manya had given me. It seemed strange to have been gone so long and to have so few things to take. When my packing was done, I went to find my mother.

She was getting food ready for our trip. "How long will it take us to reach Brichen?" she asked my grandfather.

"Oh, a while, I'm afraid," he answered. "If we walk stadily each day we should reach Brichen in two weeks."

"Two weeks," I said in surprise. "That's a long time. Are we that far away?"

"Yes, Imic," my grandfather replied, "we are a long way from home."

Our house gradually filled with people. All those who would be making the trip gathered there. Everyone carried bags that held their meager belongings. There was excitement in the air. People talked about their homes and how everything would be wonderful when they returned. Soon all forty-five Jews were assembled, and we were ready to leave. Our plan was to walk until sundown, rest for the night and begin again early the next morning.

The weather was still very cold and my grandmother wrapped two blankets around me. The snow was beginning to melt in the sun, but the air still cut right through my clothes.

I looked around Sumeuka as we walked. I could see the vast fields of wheat covered with melting snow and the sugar beets beginning to come up.

"Well, Imic, we are leaving this world and going to another," my grandfather said as we walked through the deserted town square. "Here we have known only terror, pain, death and a hard, hard life. We will return to our world where there is laughter and joy." He seemed to be talking mostly to himself and had a faraway look in his eyes. I didn't reply, only squeezed his big hand.

I looked at the people around me. How sad everyone looked. They had all lost part or all of their families during the years in Sumeuka. How could this have happened to us? Why? I could never find an answer. I had learned a lot about life these past three years. I had learned how to lie, what it was like to hate, to love, and most of all I had learned what it meant to be hungry and cold and to work very hard. I had seen things that most children would never see--death, sickness, cruelty, destruction, murder. I would remember these things for a long time.

The sun was very low in the sky when we stopped for the day. A small fire was built from a few sticks of wood and we huddled together to keep warm as we ate a supper of bread and cheese.

I was sitting very close to my grandmother. She put her arms around me, and I said, "Why did all this happen to us, Grandmother? Doesn't God love us any more?"

"God is just asleep, Imic," she said softly as she rocked me back and forth in her arms. "To God, a day is not just twenty-four hours, it can be three years or even ten years. He will wake up soon, and make everything fine again. Let us say our prayers to God tonight and he will hear us."

She began the familiar prayer softly, and I joined her. The others began praying softly with us. "I wish God would wake up right now and hear us, and make everything all right again. I wish God would send Papa home with us, and we could ride great white horses and--"

"Sh! Imic, go to sleep now. Tomorrow will be another long day," she whispered. I lay my head on her lap, and soon I was asleep.

We started early the next morning and walked through miles of open fields and a few forests. We passed through several towns, and all we saw were burned buildings, a broken tank, a German helmet here and there. Only chimneys stood where whole houses used to be. The towns were deserted. "Where are the people, grandfather?" I asked in dismay.

"Everyone is either dead or has run away," he answered, not looking at me.

We walked on and on until I lost track of the days. Because they had so little to start with, many people had already run out of food. We ~~would~~ shared our food with the others, but we were running low too. That old feeling of hunger was coming back and I was frightened. "Mama," I cried, "what if we don't have enough food to eat?"

"Your grandfather and some of the others have gone to look for food, Imic. God will take care of us. He always has, so don't worry," she said. Something in her voice made my doubt that everything wouldbe all right, but I didn't say anything.

Grandfather returned with a sack full of sugar beets. They were not ripe yet and tasted terrible, but they made the pain in my stomach go away.

As we continued to walk we began to see people for the first time. They looked like farmers. As we passed by the firleds they stopped their work and hung their heads, and stared at the ground. "Mama," I asked, "why don't those people look at us or speak to us?" A flash of anger crossed my mother's face and her eyes filled with hate. "I spit on them," she replied. "Just a few short weeks ago they were killing Jews to take the gold teeth from their mouths. They laughed to see a Jew dead, hugging her child frozen in the snow. That's why they don't look at us. Now that we are free, they are afraid."

My Aunt Pearl had been walking beside me and listening. She said, "They used to laugh when Jews were beaten for drinking stagnant rainwater from puddles, and today one of them offered me water."

"Did you drink it?" I asked, wide-eyed in amazement.

"No, I threw it in his face and walked on," she replied proudly.

Each town we came to was sorse than the last--bullet holes in every wall, piles of brick and stone, one wall standing where there was once a whole building. Old wrinkled faces peering from behind walls were the only things we saw alive in those villages.

I was getting very tired of walking. I couldn't keep up with the others. Grandfather would often carry me on his shoulders until I felt rested. I was riding on his shoulders when I saw a strange sight.

Just in front of us was a big road, the road that led to Brichen, my grandfather said, and on the road were many big trucks and tanks filled with men, moving slowly down the road. I had never seen those kind of trucks before so I knew they didn't belong to the Germans. The men in the trucks began waving and calling greetings. They were shouting something to us.

"Grandfather, who are those strange people? What are they saying?"

My grandfather sat me on the ground and waved back to the men. Our group had come to a halt to watch this strange procession. "Those are American trucks and tanks, Imic," my grandfather said excitedly. "The Americans sent them here to help the Russians fight Germany."

"But what are they saying?" I asked again.

"'The old ones sold us out, but we, the young, will go straight to Berlin,'" he replied.

"I don't understand what that means. Who are the old ones and where is Berlin?" I asked, puzzled.

"Never mind, Imic, wave back to them," he replied. I lifted my hand and waved at the soldiers.

I glanced at my mother. She looked carefully at every soldier. "Maybe we'll see your father," she said as if she had heard my thoughts. We watched each truckload that passed us. Everyone was looking for a husband, brother, father or friend. Many men waved at us, but my father's face never came into view. Once I thought I saw him and began to scream "Papa, Papa," but when he turned toward us I saw it was the face of a stranger.

After the trucks and tanks passed, we turned on the road and headed in the opposite direction. When it was dark we stopped for the night. "Well," my grandfather addressed the small group, "by tomorrow afternoon we should be home in Brichen." Cheers and shouts of joy exploded in the air. There were few of us left now. Many of the original forty-five had left us along the way to go in search of their own towns. Each time a group would leave, there would be tears and long embraces. It was like saying goodbye to part of one's own family. We had all suffered so much together these last three years. The last group had followed the trucks and tanks just a few hours ago. Now, as I counted, there were only fifteen of us left to make the journey to Brichen.

All of us were awake before the sun came up the next morning. Grandmother had talked last night of Brichen and vegetables growing in the garden. Mama wanted to get home and get all of our treasures out of the garage where they had been buried. Grandfather was telling me about the games I used to play with him so long ago in Brichen. "And just think, Imic, your own room, your little toys, everything just waiting for you in your own house." I began to believe too.

"Faster, Grandfather, walk faster," I said, sitting in my favorite place on his houlders. "I shall be the first to see Brichen," I announced proudly, "because I am the tallest." I suddenly felt wetness on my knees. When I looked down I saw grandfather's tears rolling down his cheeks onto my knees. Why was he crying? He said everything would be fine in Brichen.

"It's just over the hill," someone behind me shouted. Suddenly everyone began to run. I heard birds singing and as I looked I noticed for the first time that tiny little pink and yellow flowers were beginning to pop us through the melting snow. Maybe God really was awake. Maybe he had heard us afterall. We reached the top of the hill breathless. Then we saw it.

Our town was gone--destroyed--nothing was left but rubble and bricks.

My mother fell to the ground and began to scream, "Better we should have died in Sumeuka than return to this!"

There was nothing left, no homes, no laughter, no songs, no gardens, no treasures, no toys. Nothing but destruction.

My grandmother sat down on a cold rock and looked at the sky with tears in her eyes and cried angrily, "Wake up, God, we're home now. Wake up."

the Driver

PART II

COMING HOME

All we had lived for was destroyed. No one we knew was left in Brichen. My mother and I ran to our old house, but all we saw was bricks and rubble. My grandfather's house was gone, too. The streets were empty. At last we saw my aunt's house. "Mama, mama," I tugged at her sleeve. "Aunt Riva Leah's house is still here." It looked so much smaller than I had remembered, but it was still a big house.

We pushed the front door open and stood very still, listening for sounds of life. Nothing. In the big front room there was no furniture--only a few scraps of wood. The beautiful things I remembered were all gone--the oriental rug that felt like velvet, the silver samovar, the chairs and sofa ... all gone. I began to cry softly.

"Hush, Imic," my mother said. "At least we have a house to live in."

We went through the back rooms, the kitchen, and out to the yard, where once there had been a big vegetable garden. Only weeds remained.

We walked carefully down the steps to the cellar. Inside the dark, cool room I smelled the familiar musty and damp odor that I remembered from long ago. It was reassuring to me. As our eyes grew accustomed to the dark I saw some jars of food and several small straw mattresses.

"Look, Mama!" I squeezed her hand and pointed toward the jars. "Somebody left us some food and beds."

"Let's get them into the house," my mother answered, and we carried everything up the creaky steps.

A little later my grandmother and grandfather came and we all began to clean Riva Leah's house. My grandfather made a broom from the tall weeds in the yard and I was sent to the well to bring water.

The well. How I remembered the cold drinks of water I used to get from the well. My father would lift me up so I could see the long drop to the bottom. He would help me crank the chain until at last the bucket would be in sight and I could have the first sip of the cold, clear water.

My father used to say that the Rabois had the best well in all of Brichen. At least the well was still here. I thought of my father--so gentle and kind, with his big strong hands and his happy laugh. Would I ever see my father again? How long had he been gone? I couldn't remember. I used to count the days off on a little calendar my grandfather had made for me, but I had lost it somewhere on the road. I couldn't ask my mother because she would begin to cry whenever anyone mentioned his name. Someday I will go and find him I promised myself. Someday.

I carried the big bucket of water back to the house. As I climbed the steps to the porch I heard excited voices. The voices sounded familiar yet very strange, as if I had heard them a long, long time ago.

When I entered the room with my bucket everyone turned to me and began to hug and kiss me. My mother took the sloshing bucket from my hands and said, "Look who is here, Imic--your Uncle Lazar and Mima. They arrived today from Berschad." My uncle, who was the biggest man I had ever seen, picked me up and began to dance around the room. He had a long beard and a twinkle in his blue eyes. I began to remember ... my grandfather's brother. He used to carry me through the town on his shoulders for everyone to see.

Everyone began to talk at once. It seems that Uncle Lazar had been with us when we began our march, but had been taken to another collective farm not far from Bershad. When the Russians came, he was too old for the army, so he was allowed to come back to his home in Brichen.

This same scene repeated itself over and over during the next three weeks as more friends and family returned to Brichen. My Uncle Chaim returned and he spent hours with me telling me stories about how life was before the war. My aunts Golda and Rachel came to Brichen from Bershad. Their parents, my grandparents, had both died in the camp, so they lived with us. They were about 18 or 19 or maybe even 20, and they were both very beautiful. I liked them because they would play with me and take me through the town looking for other children. Every day life seemed to be getting better as more people camb back to Brichen. Faces I had forgotten came to our house, but still no father.

Every night as I lay down on my straw mattress I would ask God for two things: to please help me find my father and to someday see Manya again. I had never quite forgotten her face and her golden hair. When I closed my eyes I could see her laughing and running through the field.

The Russians in the town had not bothered us since our return. We had to register and tell them where we came from and who in our family was still missing. No one was allowed to do any business yet, but my uncles said it was only a matter of time until they could set up a meat market. I thought back to the old marketplace--all the filled stalls and noisy people bargaining for goods. What a wonderful place it had been. Now there were just a few old men selling things no one really wanted. It made me said and I didn't like to go there anymore.

THE LETTER

As I went to the kitchen very early one morning, there was a loud knock on the door. I crouched down by the stove and listened. I could see my grandfather go to the door. I was very scared. A neighbor or friend would have called out--not knocked. I heard a voice speaking Russian, and then the door was closed. My grandfather's face was white. He handed a letter to my mother. I instantly knew it was something about my father. Was he dead?

Suddenly my mother's face showed great relief and she began to cry softly. "Oh, Father," she said, "Velvel is alive. He's alive! He's been wounded and is in a Russian hospital, but he is alive!"

She suddenly noticed me crouched beside the stove. She came to me and hugged me. I said with tears in my eyes, "Oh, Papa, we will find you. Thank you, God."

My mother then did a curious thing. She stood very straight and said in a strong voice, "Yes, Imic, you're right. We will find him and bring him home."

My grandfather turned to face us. "No, Chava, you cannot go; you have no papers and you will be caught."

My mother did not seem to hear him. She looked straight at me and said, "Pack a basket with bread and beets and put on your warmest clothes. We are leaving this morning." I was scared, yet filled with excitement about finding my father.

"Chava," my grandfather said, "you don't know where he is--there are hundreds of Russian hospitals. You are very foolish to go and take Imic with you. At least let the boy stay here."

"No, Father, we will go together to find him. I'm sorry, but this time I cannot obey you."

My grandfather sighed and began to put bread in the basket. I brought all the clothes I could find to the kitchen and began to load the basket with beets and other vegetables from the cellar.

My mother stood out in the yard very quietly as if speaking to someone that no one saw. She returned to the kitchen, kissed my grandfather, and said in a gentle voice, "Velvel, Imic, and I will return. Don't worry and tell the others not to worry, but don't speak of this to anyone else."

She closed the kitchen door, and as I looked back through the glass I saw my grandfather's face with tears rolling down his old wrinkled cheeks.

THE SEARCH

"Mama," I asked after we had been walking for several hours, "which direction are we going to find Papa?"

"I'm not sure, Imic," she replied, never losing the rhythm of her step, "but he must be in a hospital in the Ukraine. We will follow this road until we come to the Dneiper River, and there we will cross into the Ukraine."

We were walking on a main highway and several large army trucks passed us along the way. Farther up the road all the trucks seemed to be stopping.

"Look, Mama," I pointed. "The big trucks are stopping in a line up there."

"I see that, Imic," she said, squinting her eyes against the sun. "That must be the border between Bessarabia and the Ukraine. We will have to get off the road and hide in the woods until dark. We have no identification papers."

I began to have that old feeling in my stomach and I couldn't breathe right. I sneaked a glance at my mother. How beautiful she looked--so calm and unafraid. I squeezed her hand and promised myself that everything would be all right as long as she was there with me.

She led me off the road into the deep forest. It was so cool and still in the forest. The only sound was the crackling of the leaves under our feet. We walked in the direction of the border, where we could see the trucks lined up in the distance waiting to cross.

"How will we get across, Mama?" I asked. "Do the guards go to sleep at night?"

"No, Imic. At night new guards come and take their places. I don't know how we'll get across, but somehow we'll find a way. Let's rest now so tonight we won't be tired." She began to spread a few rags from our basket for me to put my head on. I fell asleep almost immediately. When I woke up the sun was very low in the sky and little diamonds of sunlight were dancing through the leaves of the trees. For an instant I couldn't remember where I was and thought that I must be dreaming. Suddenly fear gripped me and I realized that I was alone in the woods. Where had my mother gone! I looked around and saw that our basket was gone also and in its place was a slab of bread and a few sugar beets. Had my mother been discovered by someone and taken away? But I knew she would not have left me alone unless she was going to return.

"Be brave, Imic," I said half aloud, trying to convince myself that I was in no danger.

I tried to eat the bread and beets, but the smell and sight of the food made me sick to my stomach. I sat very still, listening for the sound of approaching feet. All I heard was the eerie sound of wind in the trees and a bird singing a sad song. The sun was sinking lower and lower and I was beginning to get cold.

Suddenly I could no longer hold back the tears and I began to cry silently. I lay down on the rags and let the tears come. A few minutes later I heard the sounds of footsteps running through the still forest. I froze--not moving a muscle, not daring to look in the direction of the sound.

Maybe they would think I was dead and just go away and leave me here. I must be careful not to breathe too hard. I lay very still until the footsteps stopped. Silence. No footsteps, no voice. They must be deciding what to do with me.

"Imic, Imic, wake up," my mother's voice said. "You've been asleep for hours."

Was it really my mother? I opened one eye and saw her beautiful face staring down at me. She was breathing heavily from running and tiny wisps of black hair were showing from beneath her scarf. Her face had little beads of perspiration on it and she looked tired.

"Oh, Mama," I cried, "where did you go? I was so afraid. I thought someone had taken you away."

"You silly boy," she laughed, "do you think I would let someone take me away from you?"

Suddenly I was very hungry and picked up the bread and beets and began to stuff them in my mouth. The bread tasted salty from the dried tears on my face.

"Imic, listen to me," my mother said seriously. "We are at the border between Bessarabia and the Ukraine. While you were sleeping I saw several wagons belonging to farmers come down the road. I realized that there must be farms not far from here and that in order to get money for our trip we must have something to sell.

I took our basket and found a farmer and told him the whole story about you and me trying to find Papa and not having any money or papers. He said that the one thing that people in the Ukraine want to buy from the farmers in Bessarabia is fatback. He gave me a basketful to sell along the way."

"What is fatback?" I interrupted.

"Fatback is part of a pig that some people eat and cook with," she said.

"Why would anybody want to eat a pig?" I exclaimed, remembering that awful pig that had belonged to Manya's father. He used to root in the dirt and always smelled so terrible. "Pigs are dirty, filthy, smelly animals," I said in disgust.

"Some people, Imic, are like animals themselves. God has commanded us not to eat many things because they are not clean," she said sternly.

"Tonight, when the moon is high," she continued, "a wagon filled with watermelons will come to the road and take us across the border. You must be very brave and not say a word. I will talk if anyone asks any questions. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Mama," I said quietyl, marveling at her bravery.

"I must rest now." She lay her head down on the rags and in a few minutes she was asleep. I stood up quietly and went to peek into the basket. I lifted the cloth and saw the disgusting stuff--white fat with a thick, tough-looking skin. So this was fatback. I couldn't imagine anyone even wanting to touch it, much less eat it.

"I guess Mama knows what she is talking about," I said to myself. I lay down beside my mother and closed my eyes. How many more days and nights until we can see my father, I wondered? Will he know us? I tried not to think that he was badly hurt--maybe just a little sick. I could see his blue eyes looking me over and I could hear his voice saying my name. "My little Imic," he would say, "how much you've grown. You are getting to be quite a man now." If he only knew how frightened I was, he wouldn't think I was getting to be quite a man. Would I ever get over being afraid? Would the sound of loud voices, footsteps, and knocks on the door ever mean anything but fear to me?

I must have fallen asleep because the next thing I knew my mother was shaking my shoulder gently and saying it was time to go. I got up immediately and took her hand. She held the basket in her other hand. Very quietly we walked towards the road. I looked up and saw the moon high in the sky and could barely see the dim outline of a wagon in the darkness.

Wordlessly the farmer helped me up to the front seat with him and motioned to my mother to lie down in the back with the watermelons. He handed me the reins while he helped my mother hide her basket under the watermelons. My hands were shaking so badly that the reins nearly dropped and the farmer quietly took them away from me. The wagon began to move slowly down the road. The wheels creaked along in the silent night and made strange noises in the air. I could see a dim light in the distance and knew that must be the border.

I looked back at my mother in the wagon and she put a finger to her lips, urging me to be silent. I was too scared to say anything even if I had wanted to.

The farmer slowed the horse as we approached a barbed wire fence. There was a wooden building high off the ground, with steps leading to it. Inside was an electric light and a soldier with a machine gun pointed at us. Another soldier was standing on the ground with a gun in his hand. My heart was pounding and I gripped the wagon seat until my knuckles turned white. I closed my eyes and pretended I was having a nightmare and that I would wake up soon in my own bed in my Aunt Riva Leah's house in Brichen.

"Your papers!" came the command from the guard.

"Here, sir," answered the farmer, handing over a folded paper from his pocket.

The guard looked straight at me and pointed with his gun. "And him?"

My eyes held his stare. I wouldn't lower my eyes from his gaze. My heart was pounding and I felt my hands going cold.

"My son, of course," replied the farmer. "My wife is asleep in the wagon. We are on our way to the market to sell our watermelons."

I looked quietly at my mother, who was pretending to sleep. Even I was fooled for a minute, because she looked so peaceful and calm.

"You may pass," said the guard, "but no stopping along the

the way." He handed the papers back to the farmer and once again the creaking wheels began to turn.

As soon as we were safely across the bridge and out of sight of the guards, my mother sat up and patted me gently. "I know we will find your father now, Imic. We are in the Ukraine."

We traveled in the wagon for the rest of the night, all alone on the road going further and further away from Brichen. As the stars and moon faded away, I saw the sun beginning to shine on a town.

"Mama," I said excitedly, "there's a town up there--I can see it."

"Yes," said the farmer. "That's Mogilev Podolsk. There's a train station there. Try to get tickets to Shmerinka Vacksal."

Mama took our basket, thanked the farmer, and we walked toward the train station. My tiredness was catching up with me and each step was harder and harder to take.

"I am so tired, Mama," I said. "Can we rest here in this park for a few minutes?" My mother looked around and motioned towards an empty bench. "Imic, you stay there. I have something to do. Sleep. I'll come back soon and we'll go on to the train station. Do not speak to anyone!"

"Yes, Mama," I said, my eyes already half closed. The bench felt hard and cool against my head and soon I was sound asleep.

"Wake up, Imic," my mother's voice said. "We must go on to the station." I looked up at her and raised my body off the bench.

"Where did you go, Mama? Have you been gone a long time?"

"I had to sell some fatback to get some money for our tickets," she said. Poor Mama, I thought; she is so tired.

We walked until we came to a great station with many trains in the yard. There were many people everywhere, all of them carrying bundles and baggage. No trains were moving but everyone seemed to know where he was going. We went to the window where an old woman sold tickets.

"Two tickets for Shmerinka Vacksal," my mother said.

"Where is that, Mama?" I whispered. I had never heard of that place before.

"Not now, Imic," my mother replied, sounding a little angry.

"Your papers, please," said the old woman.

"Our papers are lost," my mother replied in her saddest voicce. "They were stolen from our home."

"No papers, no tickets," said the old woman and slammed the window shut, just missing my mother's fingers.

My mother turned quickly around, her eyes filled with anger, and began to run down towards the trains, dragging me behind her. She went up to an old man loading baggage on a cart. "What time does the train for Shmerinka Vacksal leave?"

The old man did not answer. He pointed to the basket she was carrying. She immediately understood and lifted the cloth a little so he could see inside. She took a piece of the fatback wrapped in a rag and handed it to him.

"Nine o'clock tonight, track 7," he replied without looking at us, and moved along the platform with his baggage cart.

I looked at the big clock in the station and saw that it was only ten o'clock in the morning.

My mother led me back into the station and we sat down on a bench to wait. She opened the basket and gave me some bread and beets. We ate in silence. Finally I couldn't stand it anymore. "How are we going to get on a train with no tickets?"

Tears filled her eyes. "Oh, Imic, I am such a fool. I should never brought you along. I should have listened to your grandfather. You are too young to go through all this."

I held her hand tightly and said in a soft voice, "No, Mama, I had to come. I had to go to look for my father. I won't ask any more questions and I won't cause you any trouble."

She smiled and put her hand on my head and said gently, "Let's try and sleep. We have a long night ahead of us."

She stretched out on a bench, never letting go of the basket. I tried to sleep but my mind wouldn't stop thinking. I closed my eyes, but instead of seeing my father's kind face I keep seeing the face of the guard at the border pointing a gun at me and ordering me off the train.

I lay there a long time with my eyes open so I would not see that face, watching my mother sleep. Finally I began to play a game. I looked at the people in the station and tried to guess where they were going and who they were going to see. One of my favorites was an old woman who was very short and fat. She had more bags all around her than I could count. Every few minutes she would reach into one and pull out something to eat. Once she smiled at me when our eyes met--a grin showing a mouth with not very many teeth. I made up a wonderful story about her returning home after being away for a long time. She had many grandchildren and each bag was filled with toys and goodies for them. When I got tired of that game I counted the number of bricks on the wall in the station. I played this game until the clock in the station said 7:30. My mother woke up, looking very rested, and we ate again from the basket.

Finally she said, "It is time to go to track 7, Imic. Stay with me and do what I do."

"All right, Mama," I assured her.

We found track 7 and saw the train. It was already filled with people and it was still an hour before it was supposed to leave. It was the longest train I had ever seen. I tried to count the cars as we went past them, but I lost count at 27. My mother was looking into every car as we went past. I could not understand what she was looking for, but remembering my promise I said nothing. When we reached the front of the train we got on the first car. I had never been on a train before and I thought this was all very exciting. The car was all in red. Two red seats facing two more red seats. Above the seat were racks made of metal where people put their suitcases. Each window had a little curtain that pulled down. We scrambled into the last two seats facing the end of the train.

All of a sudden the train began to move, slowly at first and then picking up speed as we moved out of the station and through the city. The lights of the town grew dimmer as we headed into the countryside. I kept looking out of the window, but soon we were going so fast that the dark night became a blur.

Suddenly my mother grabbed my hand, dragged me to the aisle, and began to walk very quickly towards the door at the end of the car. When we opened the door, a lot of steam came up and we couldn't see anything. Someone else was passing us in the steam but we couldn't see who it was. As the door closed behind me I looked through the glass and saw the gray and red uniform of the conductor. He was moving towards where we had just been sitting. Now I understood what my mother had been looking for in every car window--the conductor. We had to keep moving whenever he came through to collect tickets. We found two more seats in the last car, and as soon as we saw him coming we would go to the car door and stand in the steam so he could not see us. At last he stopped walking and we both sat down and tried to sleep. The last thing I remembered was the clacky-clack of the train wheels.

SHMERINKA VACKSAL

I awoke with a start. The train had come to a stop and I saw hundreds of people everywhere. We must have arrived in Shmerinka Vacksal. I had never seen a place quite so big. There were hundreds of train cars, many of them loaded with tanks, trucks, and jeeps. No one seemed to be going anywhere; people were just standing around.

We joined the crowd of people on the platform and waited. I did not know what we were waiting for. My mother seemed to be listening to the other people talk. I stood very still beside her. Finally she took my hand and we walked away from the crowd. At the last track my mother stopped. She pointed to a train filled with tanks. The tops of the tanks were covered with large cloths that had leaves and trees on them.

"Why are all those trees on this train?" I asked.

"To camouflage the tanks," my mother replied. "When planes fly over they won't know what it's carrying. All the pilots will see is a forest."

My mother lifted the tarp and pushed me inside. It was very dark under all those branches. I couldn't breathe very well and that old feeling in my stomach returned. I touched my mother's arm and said, "How do you know where this train is going?"

"I heard some people say that these tanks and trucks were being delivered to Odessa. I know there are several hospitals near there. This train will take us within a few miles," she replied.

Suddenly we heard footsteps running down the platforms and shouts of angry voices.

"Be still, Imic," she said quickly. The sunlight hit our faces. We were caught! Arms and hands were grabbing at us and pulling us forward. I looked at my mother and saw nothing but rage in her face. Tears welled up in my eyes and I saw everything through a blur. I clung to my mother as the soldiers kept pushing at us with their guns. No one said a word. We just kept walking down towards the station, past hundreds of cars on the trains, past all those staring people.

We were now at the door of an office marked NKBG. This was it, the end, the office of the feared secret police of Russia. I squeezed my mother's hand but she didn't squeeze back. Her hand felt very cold and lifeless. I could feel my heart pounding and like all the life was running out of my body. I suddenly was very sick to my stomach. The next thing I knew we were sitting in front of a desk looking at a soldier with the meanest eyes I had ever seen.

"Your papers!" he shouted at my mother.

"I have no papers," she screamed back at him in a voice I had never heard before. It was as though another person were in her body.

"Why were you on the train?" he demanded.

My mother didn't reply. There was a long silence. He kept tapping his desk with his short fat fingers. The sound echoed throughout the small room like the roll of a drum. Who would speak first? The soldier and my mother were staring at each other. Finally the soldier began to write something on an official-looking form and said something to the man who had brought us here. I couldn't understand all of it, but one word I did know was "Dombass." That was where they sent women to work in the coal mine. The soldier who had brought us from the train stood up and put his hand on my mother's arm. She looked at him with hate-filled eyes and picked up our basket and flung it across the desk in the soldier's face.

"You bastard! You son of a whore!" She was screaming now. "My husband was wounded fighting in your glorious Russian army so that animals like you can live and is now lying somewhere wounded in a hospital, and you have the nerve to try and stop his wife and only child from finding him. You or anyone like you will never stop us!"

She picked me up, spat on the soldier, and ran out the door and down the platform back to the train where we were discovered. She stopped at the exact same car, pulled open the tarp and shoved me in, and got in beside me. I was too stunned to speak and we sat silently, not daring to breathe, listening for footsteps. Nothing happened--only silence--and soon we heard the now familiar clacky-clack of the train wheels. We were on our way again. We didn't speak of the incident in the office again, but I knew I would never forget how my mother had looked or how her voice had sounded.

The wind was icy cold as it whipped through the tarp above our heads. Mama and I huddled closer and closer together as the train began to go faster and faster. When the wind blew the tarp up I could see sparks of fire where the wheels hit the track. Miles and miles of fields stretched before us and on either side.

The wind began to blow harder and I was very cold and hungry.

I tried to talk to my mother but my voice could not be heard above the wind and the sounds of the train. I crouched down as low as I could to escape the freezing wind. The sun was fading from the sky and soon everything was dark. I could no longer see my mother's face. The sparks from the wheels were brighter and the wind was colder. I huddled closer to my mother and prayed that this trip would be over soon. I imagined our bodies being ripped apart by the wind and lying frozen on the railroad track. I tried to think of other things, but each time I closed my eyes I would see the face of that policeman staring at our bodies on the track.

I could feel cold tears on my cheeks. Why was I crying again" I closed my eyes very tightly to keep the tears inside. I want to go home, I thought to myself. We'll never find my father. We will die here on this train and no one will ever find us in the fields. I put my head on my mother's lap and buried my face in her dress. She put her hands on my head and began to stroke my hair. She was so warm. Even on this terrible train I felt safe when she was close to me. Someday we would all be safe....

I must have slept because suddenly I felt the train slowing down and stopping. I peeked out from under the tarp, and up ahead I could see the long curving train in the darkness. There were fired all over the ground. In a few moments the train started again and I heard a loud crash overhead.

"What was that?" I yelled at my mother over the noise of the wheels.

She shook head to say she didn't know. Again the sound was heard, over and over, like explosions. The train began to go faster and faster into the night. It was going so fast I had to hold on to the tank track to keep from being thrown off as the train rounded a curve. Suddenly I saw the lights of a plane overhead. Another explosion. They must be bombing this train from the air. Those were bombs I heard. The train kept moving and suddenly we were in the middle of a dark forest. The train slowed down and the explosions sounded very far away. The train stopped and we heard loud screaming voices. "Spy, spy," they shouted. Were they talking about us? Had someone seen us? I grabbed by mother and we carefully lifted the tarp. A woman jumped from the car next to ours. She fell to the ground, rolled over, stood up, and ran into the forest. In less than a minute soldiers with guns were running after her, screaming for her to halt. The next sound I heard was a round of shots deep in the woods. My mother grabbed my arm and pushed me off the opposite side of the train. I fell as I hit the ground. She picked me up and said, "Run, Imic, run as fast as you can."

We both ran into the dark forest until we could no longer hear the voices or see the train. We were both panting and out of breath as we dropped to the ground beneath a tall tree. In the air high above us I could hear the faint noise of an airplane, but everything else was quiet.

"Those were German planes, Imic," my mother said before I could ask. "The woman who jumped off must have been a German spy and she was sending messages to the planes about the train."

"How did she do that, Mama?" I asked.

"By throwing flares off the train," she said.

Now I understood. All those fires I saw must have been the flares that told the Germans the location of the train.

"What do we do now, Mama?" I asked sadly. "I am very hungry."

"I know, Imic. So am I," She replied. "We'll stay here until it gets light and then we'll go alon g the track until we come to the next town. We'll buy some food there and ask directions to Odessa." My mother seemed so sure of everything, even my hunger pains seemed to lessen a little. I slept on the cold, hard ground, my mother's arms around my shivering body.

As the morning sun came through the trees I awoke with a start. Where were we? Suddenly I remembered last night. I knew it was no bad dream. I awakened my mother and we began the long walk back to the railroad tracks. I must have some food, I thought. My mother stopped suddenly.

"Berries, Imic--wild berries. Come and help me pick them," she said excitedly. She took off her scarf and we filled it with the small red berries. Nothing had ever tasted quite so good to me before as that juicy red fruit. We ate three scarfsful of berries as we walked.

Far away I saw a clearing. "That must be the track," my mother exclaimed joyfully. We ran toward the clearing, found the track, and began to walk beside it. The train was gone. It must have taken off sometime during the night. The sun was overhead, and for the first time in a long while I was warm. We continued in silence for a long way.

I was getting very tired, but I had to keep going. I had to keep us with my mother. I couldn't let her be sorry for bringing me with her. On and on I walked, putting one foot in front of the other--not thinking, just walking. I was concentrating so hard on moving I didn't even see my mother stop until she called my name. I turned around and ran back to where she was standing. I followed her look and saw a planted field with a little house off in the distance.

"A farm," she said quietly. "There we will find food."

"Do you think the farmer will give it to you?" I asked, imagining once again the face of the policeman standing in the door of the farmhouse.

"Maybe not to me," she said, "but to you."

"Me?"

"Yes, Imic," she said. "You will go to the door of the farmhouse and tell the farmer that you have lost your food and that you are very hungry. I will wait beside this tree for you. Be very polite and thank him. But answer not one question unless he asks where you're going. Tell him your father is a Russian officer and you're on your way to the next town to meet him."

This was my chance to show my mother that she was wise to bring me. I must do it. My knees began to shake and my hands got cold and sweaty. I wiped them on my pants and began to run towards the farmhouse before my mother could see how I was shaking. I ran all the way without looking back. I climbed the two steps to the porch breathlessly and knocked timidly at the old wooden door.

"Maybe no one will be home," I wished, ashamed of being so frightened. There was no sound on the other side. I knocked louder. My whole body was trembling. Suddenly the door opened and a little old wrinkled gray-haired woman appeared.

"What do you want, child?" she asked, looking first at me and then all around to see if I was alone.

"Please, ma'am, some food," I asked in a timid shaking voice. My whole body was shaking and my legs felt as if they were frozen to the porch.

"Don't be frightened, lad," she said in a squeaky old voice. "Come inside and we will talk."

"Oh no, ma'am. I can't," I said. "My father is a Russian officer and he is waiting for me in the next town," I lied.

"And what are you doing way out here?" she questioned. "Were you thrown off the train when it was bombed?"

"Yes. Yes, that's what happened," I lied again. "The train was going so fast that I fell off into the woods. Before I could get back on, the train left."

"Wait here," she said. She closed the door and I was alone again on the porch. Where had she gone? What if she signaled the police? Maybe I should run away before she came back. The door opened and the old woman handed me a basket full of corn, tomatoes, beets, and a big chunk of bread.

"Don't tell anyone where you got this food, boy. Now hurry and find your father and speak of this to no one."

Gratefully I thanked her and ran as fast as I could back through the fields towards my mother. I felt overjoyed. Maybe I was a little brave after all. My mother would be so proud of me when she saw all this food.

I found my mother beside the big tree. "Look, Mama. Look what I have," I shouted, full of excitement.

"You are a brave boy, Imic. I am very proud of you and I know your father would be, too," she said with admiration.

What a feast we had! We ate all the beets, tomatoes and bread, and saved the corn for another time when we could build a fire and roast it. We began our journey again. The sun became very low in the sky and still we were walking. On and on, following the track, we passed many farms. But still no town. The sun went down and the moon was very bright. The wind was cool but not yet cold.

"Let's stop and rest now, Imic," my mother said tiredly.

"Wait, mother," I said, looking in the distance. "I see lights. Do you see them? It must be a town. Let's go on," I pleaded.

"Yes, Imic. Now I see them. I think it is a town. Your eyes are very good."

We began to run towards the lights. We ran faster and faster, and suddenly I stopped and said, "Mama, I have been here before. This is Mogilev Podolsk."

"You are mistaken, my son. We are many kilometers from Mogilev Podolsk. Many town look alike at night," she said.

"No, mother," I said firmly. "I remember. Let's go to the station. I'll show you."

We walked more slowly now, and with each step I was surer that I had been here. I had seen these same sights looking out of the window of the train when we kept hiding from the conductor. Looming ahead of us was the train station and a large sign that read Mogilev Podolsk. We had traveled in a circle, not going anywhere at all.

We sat down on the platform. My mother put her hands over her face to stop the tears that flowed from her eyes. Her body shook. I put my arms around her thin shoulders and tried to comfort her. No words were spoken that night as we both fell asleep.

THE UKRAINIAN PEASANTS

"I can't believe it," my mother said. "Five hundred kilometers we've traveled in the wrong direction. There is nothing left to do but go home and wait. I don't think we will ever find your father, Imic. We have very little money and no food and our clothes are ragged and torn." She heaved a heavy sigh and looked at me.

Poor Mama, I thought. She is so sad. Suddenly I felt very strong. "No, Mama," I said. "Let's try a little harder to find Papa. Please don't give up now."

"But, Imic," she said, "you are just a little boy and I know how tired and hungry you are."

"I can make it, Mama," I pleaded, wondering all the time if I really could. "We can sleep in the station tonight and tomorrow get on a different train," I said, trying to sound convincing.

"All right, Imic," she said, obviously pleased. "Come, let's walk to the main part of the station."

There seemed to be fewer people this time than before. No one seemed to be getting on or off of trains. As we entered the station we heard an announcement on the loudspeaker.

"All persons must leave this station before 11:00 p.m. The station will close at that time for security reasons. The next train will leave at 6:00 a.m. tomorrow morning."

Mama and I looked at each other. As we walked dejectedly away from the station and out onto the platform, the rain began. We kept walking, hoping this would just be a little shower, but the

Page Missing

"Yes, I am," I replied. The old lady took her potato from the stick and handed it to me. It was hot, but felt good in my hands. I cut it open with the stick and ate it very quickly. "Thank you very much," I said.

"What a nice boy," said one old woman. "His father will be very pround of him." They all nodded in agreement.

The food and the warm air began to make me very sleepy. I laid my head down on the floor of the boxcar and curled up. I could hear the voices of my mother and the others talking as I drifted into a peaceful sleep.

I awoke to a jarring and a loud noise. The others were startled also.

"What was that?"

"I don't know, my boy," the old man answered. The next sound I heard was a long, low whistle from far away. Then the car began to move.

"Stop, stop," the man began to shout. Suddenly all of us were shouting as loud as we could to stop the train. The car door was opened and I could see the lights of the town as the train moved down the track.

The train screeched to a halt and we all jumped to the ground. Someone must have heard us.

"Come, Imic," my mother said. "We must find a place to sleep." She began to lead me away from the train.

"You will come with us," said one of the ladies. "Our house is not far from here. We were waiting for the train when we heard the station was closing, so we decided to stay in the boxcar overnight. You will come to our home and tomorrow we will find a way to get you to Bershad. From there you can get a train to Odessa."

"That is very kind of you," my mother said meekly. "But I have very little money to give you."

"We don't want your money," the old man said. "I have a son who is wounded in a hospital also. I want to help you find your husband because if my daughter-in-law was in trouble like you are, maybe somebody would help her. Now come with us. We could all use a good night's sleep."

I felt great relief. Maybe everybody in the world wasn't mean and cruel.

We followed the three old people down the railroad tracks toward the lights of the town. We walked along the quiet cobblestone streets past stores and shops locked up for the night. We turned into an alley, and at the end of the alley the old man put a key into the lock and ushered us inside his house. It looked like a beautiful place to me—white lace curtains at the windows and bright colored rugs on the floor. The curtains were old and ragged, but they looked very clean. We walked into a hall where the old man hung his coat on a peg. On the left was a tiny kitchen with a big black stove and a little sink. The next room looked funny. It also had a sink in it, and a long white box on the floor, as well as a round thing.

"What's in there?" I asked before I could stop myself.

The old man laughed. "That's a bathroom. Haven't you ever seen one before?"

"Of course," I replied with embarrassment, "but only outside."

"Well then," he said with a chuckle, "you must try our inside bath." He took my hand and led me to the room. "This," he said, pointing to the long white box, "is a bathtub. It is for bathing. See, the water comes out here." He turned two shiny handles and water began to come out of a tiny thing. "This is hot and this one is cold." He took a little rubber plug and put it in a hold and the tub began to fill with water.

I had never seen such an amazing thing. I thought about the dreaded iron tub that was in our kitchen and the big kettle of water heating on the stove to be poured into the tub. But this! Well, this was wonderful.

"You must be very rich," I said before I could stop myself.

"Imic!" my mother said sternly.

The old man threw back his head and laughed.

"No, my boy, I am not rich. I have been a plumber for many years. I put this bathroom in myself. Come and try the tub." The water was rising and the clean, clear water looked inviting.

"Can I, Mama?" I asked timidly.

"Of course, Imic," my mother said, smiling.

The old man turned off the water and closed the door behind him. "When you're done, just pull out the plug. I'll fetch you something to sleep in."

I tore off my ragged clothes and jumped into the warm water. It felt so good. I splashed around, first lying on my back and then on my stomach. I found a cake of soap and rubbed it all over myself. Soon I was covered with bubbles. I looked just like a snowman. I began to giggle. The old man knocked at the door, opened it a crack, and laid a towel and a white gown on the floor. I rinsed off the soap bubbles and pulled the plug. The water gurgled down the tiny hole and I was sitting in an impty tub. I wondered where the water went. I dried myself quickly and dressed in the warm gown. The others were sitting around a table with plates of food on it. Suddenly I was very hungry.

I climbed on my mother's lap and began to eat. I thought I would never have enough. Fish and eggs and tomatoes with cucumbers and big, firm pieces of chicken. There was more food here than I had seen in a long time. I was so full now and warm and clean, I wished that I didn't ever have to leave here.

The women began clearing the table and preparing the beds. My mother laid me down on the bed and covered me with a warm rug. The cool sheets felt good against my face. She kissed me lightly and said, "Sleep well, my son, and pray that we find your father." She tiptoes out and soon I heard one of the old women talking to her in the next room.

"Tomorrow at nine a.m. a truck will leave from the grain factory to make a delivery to Bershad. My nephew is the driver. You and the boy will go to the factory tomorrow with a letter from me. Ask for Michael and give him the note. He will put you in the back of the truck. Just before you reach Bershad you and your son get out. From there you will go to my sister's house. She will help you get to Odessa."

My mother began to thank the old woman, but her voice broke and she began to cry with relief. "I don't know how to thank you," she sobbed.

"Let's get some sleep," the old man said, and soon I felt my mother's warm body next to mine.

"Everything will be all right now, won't it, Mama?" I whispered.

"I hope so, Imic, I hope so."

GOD BLESS MICHAEL

We arrived at the grain factory early the next morning after a peaceful night's sleep. All the hunger and tiredness of the past few days were gone and I felt very good. Mama had the letter in her dress to give to Michael. The old people had gotten up early to go to the train and had left us fresh bread and big chunks of yellow cheese to eat. Mother had left her silver bracelet for them. It was the only thing of value she owned. The bracelet was very special because my father had given it to her when I was born. Through all the years in Sumivka she had never taken it from her arm, and now it was gone. I only hoped that the old man and women would somehow understand about the importance of the bracelet. My mother left them a note thanking them and put our names and the name of our town on the note. Someday maybe we would see them again.

"Please, I would like to see Michael," my mother said to the soldier at the factory gate.

"Oh, no, not more guards," I thought. I hadn't realized that we would have to tell anybody anything today.

"What reason do you want Michael?" the guard questioned.

"I have an important message from his aunt," she replied in a very strong voice.

At that moment a buzzer sounded in the little gatehouse and the soldier turned away from us to pick up a receiver.

While his back was turned, my mother pushed me inside the gate and we ran quickly to the long warehouse just ahead. There were many big covered trucks there filled with sacks of grain.

Several men were loading the trucks from the warehouse platform. We ran behind a truck and my mother said to one of the men, "I am looking for Michael."

"Over there." He pointed at a man loading a truck further down the row. We went to him quickly. "Michael?" my mother said.

"I am Michael," came the reply. I stared at this man. He was young and very big with hair the color of sand and big blue eyes. He patted me gently on the head as he looked curiously at my mother. She handed him the note. While he read it I peeked from behind the truck at the gatehouse, but the guard was still inside talking into the receiver.

Michael lowered his voice and said, "Go out the gate and walk down the road. There is a bridge where the road turns to the left. Go down under the bridge and wait for me there. I will honk the horn twice. Come up quickly and get into the back of the truck. Hide under the sacks of grain."

He looked away from us and continued to load the grain on the truck. We hurried back to the gate just as the guard looked around.

"You still here?" he said gruffly. "Get out of here; no gypsies allowed."

Gypsies ... he thought we were gypsies! I looked at my mother and then at myself and began to laugh. My mother's clothes were ragged and her hair had straggled out of her scarf. My clothes were torn and my shoes were scuffed and had holes in them. We were carrying a basket filled with food. Yes, we did look like gypsies!

We went quickly to the bridge and walked down the steep slope to the narrow river. We climbed up on a rock and waited for Michael and his truck. For an instant I wondered if the whole thing was a terrible trick. What if the old people were spies and had arranged this meeting with Michael so he could turn us over to the NKBG? I put the thought out of my mind as I heard the two honks up above. Michael was there.

We scrambled up the bank and mother lifted me up on the truck. I climbed over the big sacks of grain to the front of the truck, got down very low and pulled the big bags up around me until I could just see the sky through the back of the truck. Mama was beside me as the truck began to roll again. It was hot and the freshly harvested wheat had a sickly sweet smell, but I didn't care. We were on our way at last.

Hours and hours we traveled across bumpy roads and over bridges. The sun was barely visible now. Suddenly the truck came to a jolting stop. Michael's voice came across the sacks of grain.

"Be very still and get as far under the sacks as you can. I can see a checkpoint station up ahead." He quickly climbed back into the cab of the truck.

As the truck started moving towards the checkpoint I began to have that old feeling in my stomach again and thought I was going to be sick. My mother was no longer visible, so well hidden was she beneath the heavy bags of grain. I pulled a big bag over my head just as the truck stopped. I could barely hear the Russian soldier speaking to Michael.

"Your papers," came the now familiar command. "Destination?"

"Bershad," said Michael.

The soldier's boots sounded on the road as he came around the back of the truck. "Unload this truck."

This is it, I thought, trembling. When the bags are unloaded, the soldier will see us and put all three of us in jail. I will never see my father's face again.

I began to cry silently. The tears covered my face and I felt better letting them stream from my eyes. I didn't try to hold them back.

"Please, sir," I heard Michael say innocently, "I must get this grain to Bershad so that it can be taken to our soldiers on the front. They are starving, and the last supply train leaves in two hours."

"That's against my orders," the soldier said. "I'm supposed to check every truck for German infiltrators."

"I am a loyal Russian," Michael said, sounding very angry. "I would never dishonor my country by carrying Germans in this truck. See for yourself," he told the guard. "But think of our own soldiers being hungry after fighting all day and half the night to protect us from the filthy Nazis."

"All right," the guard said. "Open one sack."

Michael jumped onto the truck, pulled a big sack down and ripped it open. I could hear the cloth tearing.

"Continue your trip," the soldier said, and quickly the truck began to move again.

I was alive. Michael had saved us. I pushed the bag away from my face and breathed the cool air. My mother reached out her hand. She touched my tearstained cheek and smiled. "Sometimes God does listen," she said. I just nodded my head in agreement.

Sometime during the night the truck stopped again. "Oh, not again," I cried in silence. I grabbed for my mother's hand and held it very tight.

"This is it," Michael said. "Bershad is just around the corner. Follow the road into town and ask anyone for the home of Popkov the plumber. That's my aunt's home. She'll help you get to Odessa."

My mother thanked Michael, but words could never be enough. "Someday I hope I can help you," she whispered as the truck roared away from us towards the lights of Bershad.

THE SURPRISE

Bershad looked very still. No one was on the streets. Somehow I had imagined that there would be lots of people and laughter. I always forgot that the war was still going on and everyone was afraid of everyone else. We walked in the shadows along the main street past locked doors and darkened store fronts. Finally we found a little sidewalk store with a wrinkled old man selling matches.

"Please, sir," my mother asked, "we are looking for the house of Popkov the plumber."

The old man gave us a questioning look ~~and~~ before he said slowly, "By the railroad tracks. Go to the edge of town and turn right. A white house with a black door." He turned away from us and pretended to do some work.

We followed his directions and soon found the white house.

My mother knocked on the door and we waited. There was no answer. Another knock and still no answer. All the lights were out in the house. I listened at the door and thought I heard some footsteps, but then there was only silence.

Mother and I sat down on the step. "What do we do now, Mama?" I asked.

"Let me think a moment, Imic," she replied quietly.

We sat in silence and I could hear the faint noise of airplaines in the distance. Every time I heard that sound, a fear grabbed at me and I began to feel sick.

"We will go back to the station and see if there is a train to Odessa," my mother said slowly.

My memory of trains was not a pleasant one, but I stood up and we began to walk towards the train station. I asked the question I had not dared ask before.

"What if Papa is not in Odessa, Mama? What will we do then? Where will we go?"

"I don't know, Imic," my mother replied. "I do know that there are army hospitals there. He must be there," she said fiercely.

We were walking along the tracks when the lights of an approaching train hit us--a loud whistle and the loud clacking of the wheels. We jumped off the track into the high grass and waited until it had passed. The train was a long one with many boxcars, each one covered with the now familiar tree branches. We came to the dark station as the train was unloading its cargo.

"Look, Mama," I said quickly, "they're unloading bodies!" I could see stretchers of blanket-covered men being carried down the platform towards waiting trucks.

"They are wounded soldiers," my mother said excitedly. "There must be a hospital here. Oh, Imic, maybe your father is right here in Bershad."

The soldiers were putting the last stretcher into the big covered truck. "Let's follow the trucks, Mama," I urged.

Without a word she grabbed my hand and we began to run towards the trucks. There were four of them, each covered with big tarps. The drivers started the engines and the big wheels began to turn. We ran after them. They were moving very slowly. My side began to ache with a dull pain, but I kept on running, trying to keep up. We had left the station and were turning towards the main street. Down the main street we ran, past the closed shops and locked doors. The trucks ~~were~~ turned into a side street. The pain in my side was really hurting, but still I ran, never letting go of my mother's hand. We were past the center of town, heading towards the trees on the outskirts. The trucks began to move faster. We kept running after them until my mind was in a daze. I could no longer feel the road beneath my feet. I felt as if I were running in the air. On and on we went until finally the trucks began to slow down and the first truck turned into another road. Each truck turned into the road and we turned with them. There were no houses here, only open fields with little clumps of trees. Up ahead I could see lights shining in a building. We sto-ped on the road just before we reached the building. I dropped to the ground, my breath coming in short gasps and my heart pounding. The pain in my side was slowly going away as I lay on the ground.

My mother and I lay there silently for a long time, not speaking, our breathing very loud. The trucks passed us, heading out towards the main road. They had unloaded their human cargo and perhaps were returning to the station to wait for the next trainload of bodies. I wondered if my father had been in one of those trucks.

We got up and walked toward the lights. There was a big black iron fence all around the building. The hospital itself was on a hill and it was the biggest building I had ever seen. There were steps leading to the front doors and windows everywhere. It looked as if a king might have lived there. We came to the tall fence, and off to one side I saw a long row of buildings. They looked as if they had just been thrown together quickly, not like the hospital itself. At the gate of the great fence was a guardhouse. When I saw the soldier inside, that old feeling of fear returned and I clutched as my mother's hand. We would never get through the gate and into the hospital.

"Halt!" he shouted at us. "What do you want?"

"Please, sir," my mother began in a sweet little voice, "my son and I have traveled for days to find my husband. He is a soldier and was wounded."

"Who told you he was here?" the soldier asked.

My mother reached inside her dress and pulled out the worn and tattered telegram she had received in Brichen. She handed it to him through the little window. He turned the thin sheet of paper towards the light and studied it.

"Soldiers are not allowed visitors," he said sternly.

"Could you just tell me if he is here and alive?" my mother pleaded. She sounded as if she was choking back tears.

"I can give you no information. Now, leave or I shall have you both arrested," he commanded.

I looked up at my mother in fear. I was afraid she would try to argue with him and we would be arrested. She lowered her eyes and we walked away. Suddenly I was filled with both relief and anger. My mother was giving up. She had never done that before;

why was she giving up now? Holding my hand, she walked slowly away from the guardhouse. As soon as we could no longer be seen, she pulled me over to the side of the road and behind a tree.

"We will get inside that hospital and find your father, Imic. No soldier is going to keep me out." There was an excitement in her voice I had not heard in a long time.

I knew it was useless to argue with her when she sounded like that. "But how, Mama?" I asked.

"Now listen to me, Imic," she said firmly. "You are to wait here, behind this tree. Do not move. I am going over to those buildings and see who lives there. I will find your father if he is here."

"But, Mama," I protested, "I'm afraid something will happen to you."

"You say a prayer for me, Imic, and try to get some sleep," she said, and she was gone.

"Say a prayer," I said, half aloud. I have said so many prayers lately that I think God must be tired of me. Oh well, one more time. "Dear God, please take care of my Mama. Don't let her get arrested. Please, God. Do you hear me?" I closed my eyes and listened to the night sounds of the woods. The world around me was silent—only the sound of the wind in the trees and the sound of a lone owl somewhere in the distance fell on my ears. I slid into a troubled sleep with wierd shapes and sounds racking my head. Guns and soldiers and bleeding men surrounded me and I began to struggle.

Something I couldn't see held me down and I felt like I couldn't breathe. The harder I struggled to be free, the more this faceless thing held me down. I opened my mouth to scream, but no sound came out. The bloody men began dancing around my body and then guns sounded and all was still again. I couldn't move. I was pinned to the ground and weighted bodies were falling all around me. One soldier remained. He took hig gun and pointed it at the faceless thing and pulled the trigger. The faceless thing moved away laughing and I could move again. As I started to get up, I realized the blood I saw all over me was my own and that I was the one who had been shot. I began to fall into a big, black hole full of echoing sounds of laughter. The further I fell, the louder the laughter became, until I couldn't stand it anymore. I began to scream and the laughter stopped. Suddenly the black hole ended and I was floating on something cool--just floating along. All along the way I could see faces peering at me and pointing--faces I recognized. I saw my grandparents. They looked young and happy, but I knew they were dead. I tried to reach out to them, but I floated by too quickly. They didn't reach back to me; they just turned to each other and smiled, a knowing kind of smile. Then I saw the face of one of the children I had played with--Sarah Jacobs. She looked so small and alone standing in a mist. I called her name and she looked at me as if she didn't see me. I floated by, and at the end of a long road I heard a voice shouting my name. It was a child's voice, one I had heard before. At last I saw the face. It was Manya. Her hands reached out to me. Her soft, warm, little hands took mine and began to lift me, higher and higher up through the black hole. This time there was no laughter--only silence. At last I was free. The soldiers and blood had all disappeared and I looked around for Manya, but she had disappeared. Suddenly I heard my name again and someone was shaking me. I opened my eyes and stared at my mother. I didn't understand at first where I was and I looked about wildly. My mother cradled me in her arms and rocked me gently back and forth in the dark night.

"You must have had a bad dream, Imic," she said gently, still rocking. "You were kicking and screaming. I had a hard time waking you."

"What happened, Mama?" I asked quietly. "Where did you go?"

"Let's talk in the morning. I am very tired. Everything is going to be all right. Here, eat this," she said as she handed me a soft roll filled with jelly.

"Did you find Papa?" I asked with my mouth half full of the tasty bread.

"Tomorrow, my dear. Let's sleep now," she said, already half asleep.

I watched my mother as she slept, listeing to the steady rhythm of her breathing. She looked so beautiful again. Her face had lost its old, tired look and she seemed so young and small curled up next to the big old tree. Someday, I thought, my mother will have beautiful dresses to wear again and jewels to go around her neck and rings on her dainty fingers. Someday all of this will ~~be~~ just be a bad, half-forgotten dream.

I must have fallen asleep because when I opened my eyes again I saw the sun peeping over the ground and the sky was a pale blue and yellow. It was morning. Mama opened her eyes and smiled at me. "Good morning, my little son," she said sleepily. "Are you hungry?"

"Not too hungry," I lied. I was afraid to say I was starving because I thought my mother would feel sad.

"Here, eat this," she said with a knowing smile, "even if you are not too hungry." She handed me another roll and a piece of fruit.

"Where did you get this food, Mama?" I asked curiously.

"Well, Imic, let me tell you about last night," she began. I sat in rapt attention as she talked.

"When I left you last night I crept up to the fence away from the guardhouse. I watched the hospital very closely. I saw a woman in a nurse's uniform come out. She stopped at the guardhouse and the guard opened the gate for her. She passed right by me and walked to the long row of houses. She took a key from her coat and opened a door. I followed her and knocked on the door. She answered with a surprised look on her face and asked me what I wanted. I told her I was looking for your father. She tole me to go away or she would get into serious trouble and could be arrested. I begged her to let me come in and tell her the rest of the story. She said no and shut the door in my face. I felt this was my last chance of finding your father and I began to cry. I just sat down on the step and cried. All the tears I had wanted to let our for so long finally came."

Tears came to my own eyes as I thought about my mother sitting there all alone in the middle of the night and crying.

"Anyway," she continued, "the woman opened the door a crack and whispered, 'I am so sorry; please come inside.' Gratefully, I went inside the tiny little room--not much bigger than the broom closet in Aunt Riva Leah's house. Inside the room was a cot and a little stove and a small box with a few old pictures in it. She motioned for me to sit down on the cot and sat down beside me. I told her the whole story of how the Russians took your father from us to join the army, how we came to Brichen and found it destroyed, all about you and how brave you've been."

Suddenly I felt very proud of myself. My mother actually thought I was brave.

She went on. "I told her about the trains, the ride in the truck, seeing the wounded soldiers and following the trucks here to the hospital. I showed her the picture of your father that I had brought and she agreed to help me find him. She's taking an awful chance, because if she's caught she will be arrested. She gave me this food to bring to you. Today, when the sun is high in the sky, I am to go to her room and put on one of her nurse's uniforms. We will go to the hospital together. She said a new guard goes on at noon and I won't be recognized. Then she and I will look for your father."

"Oh, Mama," I squealed with delight, "we are going to find him."

"I hope so, Imic," she said, "I hope so. Now I want you to stay here while I am gone. Do not go out to the road because someone might see you. Stay behind this clump of trees and I'll return as soon as I can."

"What if you are questioned by the guard, Mama?" I asked fearfully. "How will I know if you are safe?"

"If I haven't come back by the time the sun goes down, then you take the path through the woods to the nurses' quarters. Go to the first door--the one nearest to the hospital--and go around to the side of the building away from the guardhouse and wait. But I'm sure I will be back here with news long before sundown," she said with great confidence. "Don't worry, Imic. God has taken care of us so far; He won't stop now," she said quietly.

"I'm leaving now." She stood up. "I must take the back way through the woods. Please remember what we talked about and try, my little one, not to be afraid. I will come back with news of your father." She put her arms around me and held me close and then she was gone and I was all alone. I followed her with my eyes until she had disappeared deep into the woods. I looked around me but all I saw were trees and grass. By the side of the big tree I found some rolls she had left for me to eat. I would not eat them now--I would wait in case I really got hungry later. The sun was on its way to being overhead and soon my mother would be arriving at the nurse's room to put on a nurse's uniform and go into the hospital. I tried not to think about her having to pass the guardhouse--only about her entering the doors to the hospital. I lay down and without realizing it was soon sound asleep.

I awoke with a start. A cool wind blew over me and I realized that the sun was very low in the sky. I was very cold, but not from the wind. My mother should be here by now. I picked up a roll, but suddenly I felt very sick and couldn't eat. The sun was almost out of sight and still my mother had not returned. Should I go to the nurses' quarters as she told me? No, I had better wait a few more minutes. I squinted my eyes and looked toward the forest, but I saw nothing but approaching darkness. I began to imagine terrible things. I could almost see the guard in his green uniform with the red trim holding a gun at my mother's head and pushing her into a truck. Her mouth was a thin, tight line and her eyes were filled with hate. Just as I heard the truck door slam in my mind, another sound interrupted my thoughts. Someone was running very fast towards me. I could hear the crunching of leaves. I turned toward the sound, louder now, and suddenly my mother scooped me up in her arms and began to dance. Tears were running down her cheeks and her eyes were very bright.

"Imic, oh Imic," she said excitedly. "I found him! I found your father! He is alive and almost well. I saw him and I touched him." I was caught up in her joy and I began to cry, too.

"Oh, Mama!" was all that I could say. Suddenly I was very hungry and I reached for the roll and stuffed it in my mouth. "When can I see him, Mama?" I asked between bites.

"Very soon, my dear, very soon," she said with a smile. "But now we must return to Bershad and wait for him. Your father told me where we can stay--I'll tell you about it later. He will be released in a week. We can all to back to Brichen together."

MY MOTHER TELLS THE STORY

The bed was warm and soft. The room was strange. I woke up suddenly. An almost-forgotten smell filled my nose. I heard sounds coming from another room--a woman's voice singing a familiar song... my mother's voice. I hadn't heard my mother sing since before the war when we were all so happy in Brichen. The strangely familiar smell was now no longer strange. It was the smell of mama liga--a wonderful food made of cornmeal. I got out of bed and went in the direction of the voice. I saw my mother bending over the stove stirring the cornmeal.

"Good morning, Mama," I said, still a little confused.

"It is a good morning, isn't it, Imic," she replied with such happiness in her voice. "Did you sleep well, my son?"

"I guess so, Mama," I answered. "I don't remember much about last night--how we got here or even where we are."

"Last night seems very far away," she agreed. "Your Aunt Golda and Aunt Rachel used to live in this house. The woman who owns it now knew them both. She also knew your father. He told me about it and said we should wait for him here. We came last night and I found the woman and told her who we were. She made arrangements for us to stay here. You were very tired and sleepy so I carried you upstairs and put you into bed."

"Tell me about Papa," I pleaded. "How did he look? What did he say? Did he ask about me?"

"So many questions, Imic," she said. "I'll tell you everything, but first let us eat. See what I have made for you?"

"It's mama liga," I said happily. "I knew by the smell." She laughed and began to dish up the cornmeal mush for me. It looked like a yellow mountain on the plate. She took a piece of string and sliced off a top chunk and put it on a plate. I dug into it with a spoon. How delicious it tasted. I didn't realize how hungry I really was. I didn't speak again until my plate was empty.

"Now, Mama, please," I said, "tell me about how you found Papa."

"Well," she began, "I went to the nurse's room. When I had changed into a nurse's uniform, we went to the gate. The guard was on the telephone when we came to the guardhouse. It was a different man that the one you and I had seen before. He must have been talking to a friend because when he saw us he began to speak very softly and laughed into the telephone. He recognized the nurse and nodded at me. He put the telephone down, unlocked the gate, told us to have a nice day, and went back to his conversation."

"Were you scared, Mama?" I asked.

"Yes, Imic, my heart was pounding and my legs were shaking. I smiled all the time. My face felt like a mask. I almost didn't breathe until we were on the other side of the gate. Everyone at the hospital was very busy. Four more truckloads of wounded soldiers had arrived late the night before and the nurses and doctors were trying to make them comfortable. The men looked so thin and so sick. Many still had bullets in their bodies and were dying before the bullets could be taken out. Their faces were filled with pain and they groaned and cried out for help. The nurse and I went slowly from ward to ward saying hellow to the soldiers. There were hundreds of them. I looked carefully at their faces, but not one of them was your father. I was beginning to feel very discouraged. In the last ward seven of the beds were empty. The nurse asked an orderly where these patients were and he told her they had been moved outside to get some sun. I silently prayed that your father would be one of these seven men. We went out of the hospital into a beautiful garden filled with flowers and trees. I saw several wheelchairs lined up in the distance. We passed a patient sitting in a chair on the way. I studied his face carefully. It was not your father. I looked at the tired, thin man and suddenly realized that he had no legs. A pain shot through me. What if Velvel had no legs or arms!" My mother had forgetten I was there and was really talking to herself.

"I walked more slowly now, passing men in chairs on the way. The nurse stopped to wish each man a good afternoon, and each time I examined the man carefully. We approached three men sitting together. I saw the backs of their heads and I recognized Velvel. His hair was grayer, but the shape of his head was unmistakable. His neck was thin and had deep lines in it, but I was sure it was him. I wanted to run to him and throw my arms around his neck. My eyes filled with tears of joy, but I knew I must walk slowly and say nothing. The sound of our steps on the stone walk made him turn to look--and then he saw me. His face went white and his hand gripped the arm of the chair tightly. Our eyes met and tears came into his eyes. The nurse sensed immediately what had happened. She said 'Good afternoon' to the men and silently began to push one of the men in the wheelchair back towards the hospital. She chattered to him all the way. Soon she came back and did the same thing with the other man. She said to me, 'Bring him in soon--he shouldn't have too much sun.'

"We were alone at last in the sett-smelling garden.

"'Chava,' he said. 'Oh, Chava,' and he reached for my hand. I was choked by my tears and could only smile and hold his thin hand. He finally spoke again. He asked me how I had found him and all about you, Imic. I told him only a little about what we had done, but I said that you were fine and waiting for me outside the gates. And I told him what a very brave little boy you are, Imic."

At that moment I felt so proud. I didn't really believe that I was very brave, but I was pleased that my father thought so. My mother continued.

"He told me about this house and that we should come and wait for him here. He will be released in a week. He had been at the front when he caught yellow jaundice and got too sick to fight, so they brought him to the army hospital in Bershad. It seemed as though we had been talking only a few minutes, but I suddenly saw that the sun was sinking lower and lower. 'I must go now,' I whispered, and I touched my fingers to my lips and touched his cheek. I turned his wheelchair around and pushed him to the hospital. The nurse was waiting for me. She took the chair from me and told me to go back out through the gate before anyone saw me. I kissed her cheek, squeezed Velvel's hand, and went quickly down the long green corridors, keeping my head down as if I were in a great hurry, and slipped out the front door and ran down the steps. Several army trucks were stopped at the gates, and the guard was talking to one of the drivers. The gate was open and I went around the other side of the truck. The guard never saw me. I ran to the nurse's room, changed clothes, and came back to you."

She finished her story and sat quietly with a half smile on her face and a faraway look in her eyes.

"Oh, Mama," I said, and ran to her and hugged her tightly. "Everything will be all right now. I just know it will."

GOING HOME AGAIN

At last the week was over. We arose early to wait for my father. Mama looked especially beautiful. Her eyes were bright and her whole face seemed to shine.

We were both too excited to do much but sit and watch the street from our window. The morning turned into afternoon and still no sign of my father. I began to worry. What if he didn't get out? Maybe he was sicker than he thought. The fears grew stronger as each minute passed.

Suddenly we heard his footsteps and a knock on the door. Mother and I reached for the doorknob at the same time. We were both crying. There he was in the room. My father was here! He held me in one arm and my mother in the other. I buried my head in his neck so he couldn't see me cry. He looked so old and tired. His hair was gray and cut very short. He was very thin and his beard was gone. We hugged one another for a long time and finally we sat down and everyone began talking at once. He kept touching us as if he didn't really believe we were there. He asked us many questions about all of his family and how we had found him. I noticed that Mama didn't tell him about how everything in Brichen had been destroyed. She told him how good everyone looked, how much we had missed him, about Golda and Rachel being in Brichen, about his brother Yasha being alive. But she said very little about the town and nothing about what had happened to us on our way to the hospital. I guessed that she would tell him everything later when he was stronger. I understood and didn't say much either. Papa began to tell us about the war. He had just arrived at the front when he became very ill. He had begged the officers at the hospital to notify us, but they refused. He finally convinced someone to let us know he was at least alive, but they still refused to tell us where he was. He said he was sure my mother would come, but he was still very surprised when he saw her. He kept saying how brave I was to come to find him. Then I knew I could never tell him how scared I had been, how hungry and tired, and how I kept trying to be brave but was always afraid.

Mama and Papa sat up very late talking and whispering and laughing. There were long periods of silence and I knew they must be in each other's arms holding each other and kissing. I was so glad we were all together. Thank you, God, thank you for listening.

"How many?" said the woman's voice behind the barred window.

"Three," my father said, and put some money on the ledge. The woman asked for my father's papers. He reached inside his uniform and gave them to her through the window. "My wife and my child," he said before she could ask the question. She handed the papers and three train tickets to my father.

I couldn't believe it. We were really going on the train with tickets. Imagine--sitting on the train in your own seat without having to hide from the conductor. How easy everything was when you had the right papers.

I walked down the platform between my parents, holding each one's hand. My father looked handsome in his uniform. People nodded and smiled at him and at us, too--the same people who turned away from us just a short week before. But today was different. Today we were the wife and son of a soldier, a hero in the eyes of these people.

I stepped up on the train and we found our seats quickly. The train was very new and shiny. I guess it was made right before the war. The seats were upholstered in red velvet with little white headrests and white material on the arms. Each chair had a lever; and if you pushed it, the chair would open back--it almost made a bed. There were four chairs facing each other. My mother and father sat in two and I sat in the other by the window.

People began filling up the seats. There were many soldiers and a few old men and old women, but I saw no other children. I had seen very few since we had left Brichin. I guess they stayed inside their houses during a war. People stared at me as if they wondered what a little boy like me was doing on a train filled with soldiers and old people. I would smile at them and they smiled back. I would have liked to tell them that my mother, my father and I were together and going home at last and that we had real tickets for this train, but I only smiled and looked away.

When the train was full we began to move slowly away from the station and out to the countryside. I hope I never see this station or this town again, I thought to myself.

The conductor was coming. I could hear him asking for tickets. He would soon be at our seat.

"Could I give him my ticket, Papa?" I asked.

"Of course, Imic. Here you are," he said as he handed me a ticket.

I handed the ticket to the conductor and he glanced at it quickly and moved on to the next row of seats. It was so easy, I thought--so easy if you have papers and are with a soldier.

I pushed the lever on my chair and leaned back and gazed at the countryside. My father was talking to a man sitting across the aisle from him. I heard only parts of the conversation. They talked mostly about the war and where the troops were. The man said that the Russian army was advancing into Europe. He talked of something called "black market" and that everyone was involved in it. My father seemed very interested in this and asked questions about how people got away with having their own business. The old man seemed eager to talk to my father once he found out that he wasn't a Communist. He told my father about "buying protection" and that a Communist could easily be bought. I didn't understand much about what they were discussing, so I turned around and continued to look out the window.

We seemed to be slowing down. I saw little houses close together and soon the train station was visible. The sign said "Belz."

"Is this where we get off, Papa?" I asked.

"Yes, Imic," re said as he stood up. "I don't think the train goes any farther."

"Where are you heading?" the old man asked my father.

"We are trying to go home to a small town called Brichen," my father replied.

"Take the train to Secaron. From there it is only 30 kilometers or so to Brichen," the old man said. "More trains are running each day now that the fighting has moved away from here."

We got off the train and bought three tickets to Secaron. "The train leaves in a half hour," the ticket woman said. "Track #7."

The train on track #7 was very old and rickety looking with only a few cars. This time we sat on hard wooden benches, but I didn't mind because we were going home. There were fewer people and I could stretch out on the hard bench. The train left right on time and soon I could see the fields again whizzing past the window. The scenery looked more familiar and I knew we were getting closer to Brichen. I opened the window and even the air smelled familiar.

We hadn't been riding on the train for very long when the conductor came. My father silently gave me a ticket and I handed it to the conductor with a smile.

I sat staring out of the train windows at the passing countryside. Everything looked more familiar and I knew we were getting very close to Brichen.

Soon the train xxx began to slow down. The whistle gave a loud, long sound and suddently the train was still. I saw a small wooden building that I guessed was the train station. Everything seemed very still--just a few people standing around.

"Well, this is Secaron," my father said. "Let's find someone to take us to Brichen."

We walked through the small station and out to the front of the building. An old man was standing near a horse and wagon. He walked towards us.

"Where you headed, soldier?" he asked.

"We are going to Brichen. Can you get us there?" my father inquired.

"Climb aboard. Not much business here today," the old man said.

My mother and I sat in the back and my father climbed up to sit next to the old man. He yelled to the horse and we were moving slowly down the dirt road.

"You come from Brichen?" the old man asked.

"Yes. That's our home," my father replied. "I haven't been there in a long time. I guess a lot of things have changed."

"Seems to be a lot of people going back to Brichen now that the Russians have taken over. I brought a couple yesterday from the train to Brichen. Nice fellow he was, with a new wife. Said he hadn't been to Brichen in many years. Used to be in the meat business, he said. Asked me questions about the town and he seemed glad to be going home again."

My father had been only half listening to the old man, but now he asked, "What was the man's name?"

"Can't remember exactly," he replied. "Ray, or something like that."

"Was it Raboi?" my father asked with new excitement in his voice.

"Yes, that was it--Raboi. You know him?" the old man asked.

"He's my brother," my father said with a smile.

"Who is it, Mama?" I asked. "Could it be Uncle Chaim Leib?"

"Yes, Imic, it must be. Do you remember him?" my mother asked.

"I think so," I said, vaguely remembering a big man with a kind face who used to talk to me as if I were his friend and not just a child. I remembered a morning many years ago when he left us. I couldn't remember where he was going, but I did remember everyone was very sad and that my father had tears in his eyes. That was the first time I had ever seen my father cry.

The horse and wagon moved slowly through the farmlands along the dusty road. Soon familiar sights came into view. We were approaching Brichen. My father's eyes filled with tears as he saw how the houses had been bombed. I was sitting on his lap with my head against the scratchy wool of his uniform. I looked up at his thin face and felt tears stinging in my own eyes. It was as if I were seeing our town through my father's eyes, for the first time.

The wagon stopped in front of Aunt Riva Leah's house. The door burst open and everyone came to the street, running with arms outstretched. I was lifted down and my face was covered with kisses. My father was crying openly now as his sisters and brothers embraced him. Uncle Chaim Leib was the last to reach him. How handsome he looked--straight and tall with the same kind face. He seemed much older but somehow he still looked the same. He and my father hugged each other for a long time and both men were crying.

I noticed a thin, young woman standing near the edge of the group. She looked very frightened. Then Chaim Leib seemed to remember she was there. He walked to her and took her hand.

"Hava, Velvel, Imic," he addressed us, "this is Ita, my wife."

"Hello," she said shyly and dropped her eyes. My mother put her arms around her and hugged her. "Welcome," she said.

My grandfather picked me up and carried me into the house and everyone else followed, laughing and talking and hugging my mother and my father.

The house was filled with a delicious aroma--food! My favorite smells of chicken and homemade bread and beets. I was starved. My grandmother set the table and quickly dished out the food. Soon we had all gathered around the table. Boxes and benches were brought for us to sit on and my grandfather's booming voice began the familiar blessing.

We were home again.

LIFE IN BRICHEN

For the next few days everyone in our family talked about what had happened to each one in the other's absence. Soon the men were discussing how to open a butcher shop and get around the local government. These conversations began to bore me, so each day I would go out early in the morning and walk up and down the streets meeting the people as more and more returned to Brichen. A lot of people recognized me, but I couldn't remember very many of them. There seemed to be so few children.

My father's cousin Chaim had a son named Jacob, a little younger than me, and he had a horse. Each morning Jacob and I would get on the horse and ride up and down the streets. One of our favorite places was the house of Itzek the dyer. He had big vats filled with different colors--reds, yellows, greens, and blues. He dipped big pieces of white cloth into the vats, stirred them with a big stick, and they would become a beautiful color.

Jacob and I loved to watch him work. Sometimes he would let us stir the big vats and once he even let us pour the colors into the water. We went there every morning to help him. He would talk to us and tell us stories of famous people he had known. We would stay with him all morning and then we would ride to my Aunt Riva Leah's house and eat some bread and cheese for lunch.

Each day more families arrived and so did more children. Jacob and I would spend the afternoon playing with them. I was the smallest even though I was older than some of them. One day Jacob and I rode up to a group of boys pushing a hoop down the street. The hoop was rolling very fast down a hill and several boys were running after it. I jumped off the horse and ran after them, joining the chase. The biggest boy, Michael, turned and looked at me. The others stopped and turned, too. They were all standing there staring at me. I stood there staring back at them, beginning to feel a little scared.

"Go home, Imic," Michael snarled at me. "We don't want any babies in our gang. You're too little." At that all the boys laughed and started chanting, "Go home, baby. Go home to mama." I looked toward Jacob, and to my amazement he jumped off the horse and stood behind Michael.

"But," I stammered, "Jacob is younger than I am."

"Yeah, but he's not a baby," Michael answered. "Besides, he has a horse, and look at you. You have long curls like a baby. Go away and cry, little Imic."

I ran away as fast as I could. I was running and crying and I kept falling and hurting my knees and my hands on the rocks in the road. Suddenly I stopped and felt my hair. It was long and curly. I had never even thought about it before. I would go home right now and cut it off. Determined, I brushed away my tears and walked straight for the house. My mother and grandmother rushed to me when they saw the blood on my knees and hands.

"Oh, Imic," my grandmother began.

"Leave me alon~~g~~e," I shouted and marched into the room where my bed was. I looked into the cracked mirror on the wall. It was true. I did look like a baby and, worse yet, a girl. My hair fell in soft ringlets around my face. Why hadn't I noticed it before? Well, I can put an end to this. I reached into a drawer, pulled out a pair of big scissors, grabbed a lock of hair and cut it off. It fell to the floor, making a curl on the wooden plank. Another curl and another. I cut faster until all the curls were gone. I looked at myself again. There! At least I looked like a boy and not a sissy. I put the scissors back in the drawer and felt a slow, rising anger inside of me. How could my mother and grandparents let me look like a baby? Why didn't they get my hair cut? Suddenly a knock sounded at the door.

"Imic," my mother pleaded, "what's wrong? Please let me come in."

I opened the door and stood looking at my mother with rage. Her eyes saw my hair and then traveled to the mound of curls lying on the floor. She put her hands to her eyes and cried. "Oh, Imic, you have cut off your beautiful curls. Why, why would you do that?" Her voice was a mixture of shock and hurt.

My grandmother, having heard my mother, came running from the kitchen. She looked at me and without saying a word began to cry. My grandfather had come by this time. He looked at me and laughed. Then he put his big hand on my head and said, "So the little lamb has grown up and cut off all his hair." I looked at him in amazement. He understood. He really understood. I silently thanked him. He said, "Come on, young man, let us go and see what we can do about getting you a real haircut." I looked at myself again and suddenly began to laugh. I had been in such a hurry to get all the curls cut off that I didn't notice that my hair was in many different lengths. I looked very funny with my hair sticking up all over my head. I put my hand in my grandfather's big one and we walked past my mother into the other room. He said to my mother, who was still crying, "Come, Chava, it had to happen sometime. Imic can't remain a child forever."

We walked down to a little house next door to the police station. Yakov the barber lived there. Soon Yakov was removing my cap.

"Well, Imic, you really gave yourself a cut," he laughed. "Come, my boy, let's see if I can straighten it out a bit." In a few minutes he was finished and handed me a mirror.

"Now, look at yourself. The next time you decide to have a haircut, Imic, come and see me," he said.

I looked at myself. I liked what I saw. "Thank you, Mr. Yakov," I said. "Now I won't need to wear my cap."

My grandfather pressed some money into Yakov's hand, but he refused it. "No, let it be my gift. The next time you can pay me."

We thanked Yakov and entered the street. Each day the street became more crowded with returning families. Everyone was the same as everyone else now. Those who had had money before were now as poor as those who had had none. Whole families shared houses because their homes had been destroyed. People lived in bombed-out buildings with no windows or roofs. But slowly our town was being rebuilt. Each day wagonloads of wood were brought in to build new houses or repair what was left. Men and women worked hard to regain some of the life they had lost. There was a hopeful spirit to the people. Families were reunited and no one spoke of those members who had not survived. I often wanted to ask about some people, but a certain fear stopped me.

More and more soldiers appeared on the street, too. The Russians were beginning to organize our town government. They had taken over the police station and the post office, and the commandant and his staff stayed in a big house where a rich man had lived before the war.

My grandfather and I were walking past the old market and I pointed to an old bombed-out building--the tallest one in Brichen--and asked, "Who lives there, Grandfather? I see soldiers going in and out, but they never stay very long. Once I saw a beautiful red-haired lady leaning out of the window talking to a soldier. She looked like she was wearing a nightgown but it was the middle of the afternoon."

My grandfather looked at the building and said, "That is a bad place, Imic. Do not ask such questions and stay away from there." His voice had a strange harsh note to it and I knew better than to ask anything more. Tomorrow I would go and see for myself what went on there.

We were in front of our house now. I wondered if my mother and grandmother were still crying--and my Papa...what would he say!

He was standing by the door. "My, Imic, how grown-up you look," he said. "Now those boys will want you in their gang," he said with a knowing smile.

"Who told you, Papa?" I asked incredulously. "How did you know?"

"I was once a boy myself," he said, "and I was also very small for my age. I saw my cousin Chaim today and Jacob had come home crying because of what had happened to you. Chaim wanted to beat him, but I stopped him. Come with me. I have a surprise for you."

He took me by the hand and led me out the back door.

"What is it, Papa? A horse?"

"Oh no, Imic, something much better than a horse. Anyone can have a horse. No one has what I got for you," he said.

Papa was opening the door to the cellar and suddenly I heard the unmistakable bark of a dog. I rushed down two steps at a time and there he was--the most beautiful dog I had ever seen, sitting there waiting to be told to move. He was very big with great yellowish-brown eyes and a smooth furry coat.

"Oh, Papa, is he really mine? Where did you get him? Is he really for me?"

"Yes, yes, Imic," my father laughed, "he is really for you. He's too old to work with the soldiers anymore, so I bought him for you."

I knelt down beside the dog and laid my cheek against his soft coat. He turned his head and put his cold nose against my face and then he licked me with his warm, pink tongue.

"I think he likes you, Imic," said my father.

"Oh, Papa!" I jumped up and threw my arms around my father's waist and hugged him very tight. "Thank you for my dog. I'll take him everywhere with me. I'll feed him and brush him and he'll be the best dog in the world. I'll call him Captain."

"I don't think he was ever named before. I think he was just called Dog," my father chuckled.

"Well, from now on his name is Captain," I said firmly.

My Grandparents and my mother were all smiling when Captain and I walked in. I bowed formally to them and said, "Grandmother, Grandfather, Mama, I would like to introduce Captain, the best dog in the world and the best present I've ever had." Captain barked as if to say hello.

"Well then," my grandmother said, "since we have a new member in our family, I had better find something for him to eat."

I jumped out of bed early the next morning. I couldn't wait to see my dog. No one else was awake. I tiptoed to the kitchen and opened the door to see Captain. There he was, sitting at attention in his bed of soft rags. He looked as if he was waiting for me. I fixed him some food and water and grabbed a roll for myself. We ate our breakfast together. I sat huddled in his bed, petting him. I got dressed quickly and found a piece of rope. I tied the rope to his collar and opened the door quietly. We walked out to the street. The whole town was asleep and the light of morning was still a long way off. Captain walked beside me, never going ahead of me or lagging behind. When I would stop, he would stop. When I would run, he would run. He knew exactly what I was doing every minute. We walked side by side all over town. The sun was beginning to come up now and I could hear the sounds of morning--a rooster crowing somewhere, a horse whinnying, and people beginning to open the curtains on their windows.

Before I knew it I was standing in front of my cousin Jacob's house. I knocked on the door, and after a while cousin Chaim came and opened it. He was still dressed in his night clothes, but he looked awake.

"Good morning, Imic," he said. "What brings you out so early in the morning? Oh, I see now. Well that's a fine dog you have there."

"This is Captain," I announced proudly. "May I please come in and show Jacob?"

"Of course, my boy. Jacob is just getting up. He feels really sorry about yesterday," he said.

I followed him into Jacob's room. He was sitting on his bed when we came in.

"Hello, Jacob," I said softly.

"Hello, Imic," he said, not daring to look at me.

"Look, Jacob," I said with great excitement. "Look what I have."

He slowly turned his eyes towards the doorway where I stood and then he saw Captain standing by my side.

"Imic," he shouted, "where did you get an army dog?"

He was off the bed and down petting Captain.

"You're the luckiest person in the world," he said. "Wait until the rest of the boys see your dog."

"Come on, Jacob, get dressed and let's go find the others," I said.

We walked out into the street and headed towards the main part of town. Captain walked proudly between us. Finally Jacob said, "Imic, I'm sorry about yesterday. I was really mean to you, but I was scared of Michael. Well, you know...I thought he might beat me up if I took up for you. He's very tough."

So Jacob was scared, I thought. Well, maybe I would have been scared too. "That's OK, Jacob. Let's forget about it," I said.

Soon we were past the middle of town and walking towards the river. Jacob showed me where he and the other boys were beginning to build a fort. He said they were going to make a long tunnel under the fort where everyone could hide from the enemy.

"What enemy?" I asked innocently.

"Oh, Imic," he said in disbelief. "We pretend that we're surrounded by Germans."

"Oh, of course," I said, trying to sound as if I had known that all along. The whole thing sounded rather stupid to me. Why would they hide from someone who wasn't even there?

A low growl and a bark came from Captain. We turned and saw Michael and some of the other boys coming towards us. They were laughing and talking and hadn't seen us yet. Captain began to bark loudly as if he knew what had happened between me and Michael.

"Sit, Captain," I commanded, and he obeyed immediately.

Suddenly the moment I had been waiting for had arrived. Michael and I stood facing each other. Captain sat at attention by my side. He was looking at Michael and showing his sharp teeth. Michael looked first at me and then at Captain. Jacob had moved away from us.

"Whose dog is that?" Michael questioned in a harsh voice.

"This is my dog," I said, trying to sound tough.

"Oh, yeah? Where did you get him?" he demanded. The other boys were standing behind him, staring at me.

"A soldier gave him to me," I lied. Well, it was almost true.

"Is he a real army dog?" he asked in a mocking voice.

Captain seemed to sense that I was in some kind of trouble. He stood up and I had to hold the rope tightly to keep him from attacking Michael. A look of panic crossed his face and he took a few steps back. Captain was growling and showing his teeth.

"All right, all right, I believe you," Michael said with fear in his voice. He turned to the other boys, who had formed a tight little group behind him. They whispered for a few minutes and then Michael walked towards me with his hand outstretched.

"Look, Imic," he began, "we're sorry about yesterday. We all want you to join our gang, and you and your dog can be leaders, along with me, of course. What's the dog's name?"

"Captain," I answered.

"Shake." Michael extended his hand to me.

"All right," I grinned and shook his hand.

"All right, guys," Michael commanded, "let's get to work on our fort. Half of you go with Imic and the other half with me."

Well, I thought, I'm "in" now. Me and Captain. I scratched Captain's ear and thanked him silently for being mine.

For several months my father, his brother Chaim Leib and his cousin Haim had been selling meat to the people of Brichen. Our cellar had become a slaughter house. The cows were killed according to Jewish law and a schohet would come each time to do the killing. He was a little old man whose only job before the war was to see that the cows were killed properly. Now he worked for my father at night. I didn't know exactly why the killing had to be at night, but I had heard my father and his brother talking about working the "black market." My job was to carry a brown sack every Friday evening to the police station. I never talked to anyone. I walked into the station through a side door and left the bag with a man in a uniform. He took the bag silently and I left quickly. Once I had looked into the sack and saw that it was filled with money. I never asked my father questions because I really didn't want to know why he was giving that man money.

One morning my father told me I could go with him to buy the cows. I climbed aboard the big wagon, put Captain in the back of the wagon and sat between Uncle Haim Leib and my father. The sun was beginning to rise and the air was filled with a soft, pink glow. It was a beautiful day and I was very excited about going on this adventure with my father.

Cousin Chaim's horse seemed to know the way to the country with very little prodding from my father. We turned away from town and headed out on a dirt road into the rolling green countryside. We had jogged along for quite some time and then my father said to Uncle Haim Leib, "Let's stop here for a minute, Haim. I want to see someone." My father stopped the horse and jumped down from the seat of the wagon. We had stopped in front of a little farm house shose walls were made from sod. It was painted a bright blue with white trim.

"Who lives here, Uncle Haim?" I questioned.

"I'm not sure, Imic. I think it may be the man who stole your grandmother's things," he said, watching my father walking determinedly to the door of the farm house.

I jumped down from the wagon and ran to my father, with Captain right behind me. Just as I reached him, the door opened and I saw a look of horror and disbelief on the man's face. I had seen his face before--sometime long ago. It was the same man who had hit my father and taken Grandmother's things away.

"Velvel," the man said in a half-cry.

"Yes," my father said in an unrecognizable voice, "I am Velvel and I am alive. I have come for my parents' furniture." He pushed the man away from the door and walked into the room. The man raised his arm in protest, but my father just walked past him as if he was not there. Captain let out a low snarl and the man dropped his arm. Uncle Haim Leib was now on the porch and we went into the house. All of my grandparents' furniture was there, even the silver candlesticks. My father and Chaim Leib began to carry each piece of furniture out to the wagon, never saying a word. The farmer stood by helplessly, hanging his head. I made a face at him and Captain and I scurried out to the wagon. The wagon was full and my father clucked to the horse to go. Soon we were moving along the dirt road. No one spoke for a long time. Finally my father said, "I'm sorry you had to see that, Imic, but I just couldn't pass that house one more time without stopping. Something inside of me insisted that I go there."

I said nothing, but I felt very good. I was pleased my father had done that, but I couldn't figure out why. Maybe it was the look on the farmer's face or maybe the one on my father's.

We soon came to the pasture where we were to buy the cows. There were several grazing there--big, fat, black and white cows. While my father and Uncle Haim Leib went to the farmer's house, Captain and I walked over to the fence, crawled inside and petted the cows. Their noses were soft like velvet and very pink. Soon my uncle, my father, and the farmer returned.

"Which cows do you want us to buy, Imic?" my father asked.

I looked at the cows again and pointed to two standing by a tree. "How about those?" I asked.

My father walked over and examined them closely. "You made a good choice, Imic," he said. "These are fine cows. Someday you will make a fine butcher."

The farmer tied the two cows to the wagon and off we went back home. We arrived just after dark. We tied the cows behind the house so they couldn't be seen from the street, and my father and Uncle Chaim Leib began carrying the furniture into the house.

"Oh, Velvel," my mother cried, "your parents' furniture. Where did you get it? Did you go to that awful man's house?"

"Yes, Chava, I had to. I've waited a long time. I've thought about this day for many years," he said quietly as he began to arrange the furniture. I felt as if I were intruding on something very private, so I took Captain to his bed and then I headed for mine. I didn't know how tired I was, but the last thing I can remember was sitting down on the bed.

I was jolted awake much later by a terrible sound—the moaning of the cows. They were being pushed down the cellar steps, where they would be slaughtered. I had heard this sound many times in the last few months, and each time it gave me a terrible shock. It was the sound of fear just before death. I would be glad when the "black market" went away and the cattle didn't have to be pushed down the steps.

Captain and I were walking home from playing at the fort one day when I decided to explore the old bombed-out building. I walked around the building and found the steps leading up to the roof. Captain and I scurried up the steps and stepped on to the half-roof. I looked down through a gaping hole and saw three young girls sitting at a table. They were all very beautiful and young looking. I knelt down and leaned over the hole so that I could see better. My foot kicked a rock and it made a sharp sound as it scrapped against the bricks on the roof. The girls looked up and before I could move away they saw me.

"It's only a little boy," one of the girls said with relief.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I just wanted to see what was up here. I didn't mean to bother you."

"Who's with you?" the red-headed girl questioned.

"Just my dog, Captain," I answered with a shaking voice. "We'll leave you alone now."

"No, wait," said a voice from the room below. "What kind of dog do you have?"

"Oh, he's a famous army dog," I bragged, "a guard dog."

Captain stuck his head in the hole.

"It certainly is an army guard dog," the girl said, and looked at the other two girls.

"Say, little boy, how would you like to have a job?"

"A job?" I asked. "Me? What kind of job?"

"Well now," said the redhead, "stay right there and I'll come up and tell you about it."

Within a few minutes the red-headed girl was standing next to me on the roof.

"What's your name, little friend?" she asked.

"My name is Imic Raboi," I answered. "What's yours?"

"Oh," she said sadly, "I've had many names, but you may call me Anna."

"All right, Anna." I said the name slowly. I liked the way it sounded as it rolled off my tongue and out of my mouth. "Do you live here? Are those other girls your sisters?"

"Imic Raboi," she laughed, "you ask too many questions for a little boy."

"I am older than I look," I said, trying desperately to make my body taller. I spoke in the deepest voice I could. Anna was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. She had long red hair falling to her waits in curls. Her lips were very red--the exact color of the cherries that used to grow behind our house. Her eyes were very blue as they looked at me. Her fingernails were long and painted red. They looked dirty.

"Why do you put red paint on your fingers?" I asked, because I had never seen anything like that before.

"Oh," she said, "well, I don't know really. I guess because I like it."

There was something about her that was very, very sad. Maybe it was her eyes or maybe the way she tapped her fingers on her long, green robe. I suddently felt very sorry for her.

"Now, about the job," she began. "It's really very easy. You will come here every day at 1:00 in the afternoon and stay here on the roof until 6:00. If anyone comes, your dog will bark, won't he?"

"Yes, he'll bark," I assured her.

"That's good," she replied. "Do you know the commandant and his staff? Do you know what they look like?" she questioned me.

"Yes, I've seen them many times," I answered, thinking of those stiff, straight men in the shiny boots. "I know them."

"I want to know when they are coming. That's all." And she disappeared.

The next day, Captain and I went off to work. I scurried up the steps of the bombed-out building and shouted Anna's name into the hole in the roof. At first there was no answer. I shouted again, and this time I heard some angry-sounding voices, mostly a man's voice, and soon Anna appeared. She looked awful. Her beautiful red hair was all messed up and she looked like she had just gotten up. Her red lips were no longer red and there was black stuff beneath her blue eyes. She was clutching her green robe together at the top. She didn't seem to have on anything else but that green robe. I couldn't understand why anyone wouldn't be dressed when it was already afternoon.

"Hello, Imic," she said in a low voice. "I'm glad you're here. I want you and your dog to let me know if the commandant or his men come near this house. Will you do that, Imic?" she said in her special deep soft voice.

If only I could ask her why. "Yes, Anna, I'll let you know," I said to her.

Anna disappeared from view and I heard the man's voice again. He no longer sounded angry. I couldn't understand what he was saying, but he sounded as if he were in a hurry.

Captain and I sat on the roof, watching the people in the town. We were hidden from sight, a position I enhoyed because I could see everyone without anyone seeing me. All afternoon men came to the door of the building. Some were old, others young, and I examined each one carefully to be sure it was not one of the commandant's men. Captain and I remained silent that day. At exactly 6:00 Anna came up to the roof and pressed a coin into my hand. "Thank you, Imic. Will you come back tomorrow?"

"Yes," I stammered, afraid I would blurt out what I really wanted to know. I wanted to ask her why these men kept coming to her house hour after hour. I just looked down and began to kick a pebble with the toe of my shoe.

"See you tomorrow," she whispered, and she was gone. I stood for a long time staring after her unable to understand my own feelings. She was very beautiful yet there was something ugly about her. Her face had a harsh look. Her eyes were so big yet so sad--I had never seen anyone like her before. Suddenly I felt sorry for her and I couldn't wait to get home to be with Mama and Papa and all those people who loved me.

I opened my hand and looked at the coin she had pressed in it. It was a ruble--a whole ruble--I had never had a whole ruble before. I put it in my pocket and Captain and I ran down the stairs and out into the street. It was just getting dark so we ran all the way home. I arrived just in time for dinner. I worried that someone would suspect where I had been all afternoon.

"Imic," my mother said, "you're just in time to eat. Since you got your dog, I never know where you are anymore. I suppose you've both been spying on the enemy and guarding your fort today," she chuckled, and everyone joined in the laughter.

"Well, Captain is a guard dog," I managed to say, not daring to look up from my plate. I could feel the ruble in my pocket and my face felt hot. The conversation soon changed to the meat business and I was safe. Thereafter I hid each ruble I made in a sock under my mattress.

TALK OF BUCHAREST

My Aunt Ruchel, her husband Abrasha and her young sister, Aunt Golda, were the talk of the family. They had decided to leave Brichen and go to Bucharest. It sounded very exciting to me. I couldn't imagine what it would be like. I had never been in a big city like Bucharest. Aunt Ruchel and Uncle Abrasha wanted to go there so that he could find a good job. They were taking my Aunt Golda along so that she might find a job and perhpas even a husband. I thought that was very funny because I didn't know how she would find a husband. Would she wear a sign that said "husband wanted"? Or maybe she would advertise for one in the newspaper.

I began to dream of going to Bucharest someday and walking the wide tree-lined streets and peeking in all the store windows. Aunt Ruchel promised that I could come and visit and stay with them once they were settled. I would take the hidden rubles and buy my mother a beautiful dress.

School started. My Aunts and Uncle left for Bucharest. Captain walked to school with me each day, waited until lunchtime and walked home with me, then back again after lunch, and waited until school was out. He looked so sad sitting in the yard that the teacher finally allowed him to come into the schoolroom. He was very well behaved. He sat by the door and kept his eyes on me throughout the morning.

My teacher's name was Mr. Danilov. I felt a little sorry for him. He was a very tiny man with a skinny neck, and glasses that were so thick they made his eyes look twice their size. He stuttered when he talked, especially when he got excited. Michael and some of the other boys used to make fun of him. They would do something to upset him and he would begin to stutter. Once he got so angry he chased Michael around the room with a leather strap. Michael stopped running suddenly and Mr. Danilov ran into the door. I felt bad laughing at him, but he did look funny standing there in a daze, with a leather strap hanging from his hand. Mr. Danilov must have talked to Michael's father, because the next day Michael stood up in front of the class with his head down and mumbled an apology to Mr. Danilov. After that, not much happened at school, except that it was beginning to get very cold. It snowed almost every night now and we had to build a big fire each day at home and at school to keep warm.

I didn't see my father or my uncles much anymore. Only at mealtime did the family get together. Each morning my father would be in the cellar before I got up and come out only to eat. At night he would go into the other room with my two uncles, Haim and Chaim Leib, and talk late into the night. I could hear only little snatches of conversation. They talked about "black markets," payoffs, and the war, usually in that order, but I could never really understand the whole thing and I didn't dare ask.

One thing remained the same. Every Friday evening before the dinner, my father would call me into his room. "Imic, take this bag to the station, don't speak to anyone and come straight home."

"Yes, Papa," I replied, filled with curiosity. I had been doing this errand for a long time and I knew that there was a lot of money in that sack. "But it's so cold tonight. Can't I take it tomorrow morning?"

"No, Imic," he said firmly. "The chief is away every Friday night, so it must go tonight."

"All right," I agreed, and put on my warmest clothes. So, I thought, my father does not want the police chief to know--that must be why he wants me to give it only to the assistant chief. I left the warmth of the house and walked quickly down the road, past the market, over to the police station. I knew not to go in at the front door but to go around to the side. I knocked softly on the door. Within a second, the door opened slightly and a voice asked, "Yes, who's there?"

"Imic Raboi," I replied.

The door opened wider and I was instructed to place the sack on the table by the door. I never saw the face that went with the voice, but I did what I was told. I placed the sack on the low table, closed the door and ran into the street.

Every Friday night, I did exactly the same thing--the same voice asking "who's there?" I never saw the face, but I knew it must be the assistant chief of police. Each time I brought the bag it felt heavier than the time before, so I guess that each week my father had to pay a little bit more. I was very curious why he sent the bag of money, but somehow I knew I shouldn't ask. I felt like I was growing up. A year before I would have blurted out all sorts of questions, but now I just kept silent and tried to figure out for myself the connection between my father's meat business, the assistant police chief and money.

And I finally did figure it out one Friday night going back home. Whatever my father and uncles did in the cellar with the slaughtering of cattle and the selling of the meat must have been against the law. That must be why they worked in the cellar and not in the market. The assistant police chief knew about the business. He was paid to keep quiet and not tell the police chief. It must have been against the law to have a business that made money. It seemed strange that the Russians wouldn't want anyone to make money but themselves.

I came home and warmed myself by the big fire in the living room. I looked at my father's face in the glow of the fire. He looked old and tired. There were deep lines around his eyes. Tears of anger filled my own eyes. Why would people be so bad to my Papa? It was more than I could understand.

I walked over to him and climbed up on his knee, the way I used to when I was much younger. Somehow it didn't feel the same. I liked it better when I wasn't so grown up and I could just cuddle in my father's lap and feel that he would always be there to protect me from anything bad. I felt now like maybe I would have to protect him someday. I didn't like that feeling.

"Imic? How heavy you are. You certainly have become a big boy," my father said.

"Yes, Papa," I whispered with a strange sadness.

PESACH

A sense of sameness and normalcy came into our lives again during the winter. My father still had to do his work in the cellar, but no one caused him any trouble. We had no problems getting food, no trouble with the police, and everyone seemed almost happy. On Friday nights after I delivered my sack to the police station, the whole family would get together for a Shabbos dinner and all of us would joke and tell stories, and we would all feel good and joyful.

We had just finished a big dinner when my Papa made an announcement. "Today I received a letter from Ruchel in Bucharest. I'll read it to you." Aunt Ruchel had been gone almost three months. He began:

> My dear family,
>
> Abrasha, Golda and I arrived safely in Bucharest. We went to our old friend's home, the Latvin's (you will remember them, Velvel, they lived in Chernovitz while you were a soldier). They were very kind to us and helped us find a place to stay. We found a beautiful apartment near the King's Palace. It has three rather large rooms, kitchen and a garden. We are across the street from a beautiful park that has a fountain that always flows. Tell Imic he would like the park. The children play there all day. A man comes three times a day and sells ice cream on a stick. He rides a bicycle with bells on it so the children know he is coming. Bucharest is a wonderful city. The streets are very wide, lines with big trees. There are many very elegant stores here where

the rich ladies spend their days. On one street nearby, there are big houses where you can pay and go inside and watch a film. They are showing a lot of American films about cowboys and indians, and something called the "Wild West." King Michael came last week to greet the people of Bucharest. He is very young and very handsome. Most of the people here cheered for him, but it seems the Russians are not very happy with the young king. Abrasha has found good work for himself. He is driving a taxi and has just bought a car for himself and will hire a driver for the new car. Life is very different here--very exciting, but I miss all of you very much. I do hope someday we will see each other again.

Pesach is coming and I feel sad not to be with my family. But maybe next year.

Golda is wonderful. She has a job working in a hospital. She reads to the patients and helps them write letters, etc. She seems to be very happy here in Bucharest. I know she misses all of you too.

I will write again soon. Kiss everyone for us.

Love,
Ruchel

There was a long silence when my papa stopped reading. I was deep in thought about Bucharest and all its wonders when my mama broke the silence.

"Pesach! It's almost time for Pesach. We must begin to prepare for it. I don't know if I'll be able to have it all done before the Seder."

Pesach--that meant spring was coming. I felt glad about that. I was tired of the snow and the cold wind. Somehow I knew it was always spring in Bucharest.

"Papa," I said, "could we go to Bucharest? It sounds like a wonderful place. We could live with Aunt Ruchel."

"Oh, Imic," Papa laughed, "what big ideas you have. Our home is here in Brichen. You were born here and this is our family home. Why would you want to leave your birthplace?"

"You know what I mean, Papa," I said lightly. "The parks, the movie houses, a real king with a palace, and an ice cream man. I bet children don't even go to school in Bucharest."

This time my mama laughed. "What nonsense, Imic. Of course children go to school there. And I'm sure Bucharest has many problems too. Ruchel just makes it sound glamorous so we won't think she made a mistake by going."

A sharp glance passed between my mama and papa.

"Chava," my Papa said sternly. My Mama shrugged her shoulders and began to clear the table.

There was an uncomfortable silence and then my uncle began to talk of the business and my grandmother and mother and aunt moved to the kitchen to clean the dishes. Jacob and I went to the little room and pretended that we were King Michael of Rumania going to a movie house. I made a paper crown and put on one of my mother's capes. I felt very grand indeed. Jacob and I soon began making plans to run away to Bucharest.

There was a growing sense of excitement as Passover approached. Each dish had to be changed. Special cuts of meat were brought into the kitchen. The oven was always filled with calas and other things baked specially for Passover. Wonderful cooking smells filled the air. The whole house went through a complete cleaning. The walls were scrubbed, not just the floors. Everything had to be perfect before Pesach.

At last the first day arrived. My Mama said she had finished just in time.

The table was covered with a white cloth that my grandmother had sewn by hand. She had worked on it for weeks. It looked beautiful, all starched and ironed, not a wrinkle to be found. The dishes were new. At long last my mother had been able to buy some beautiful things to replace those that had been stolen, broken or lost. The silverware was so polished that I could see my face in the spoons. My Grandmother was putting the last fork in place.

My Mama beamed at the beautiful table.

"I have a surprise for you, Chava," my papa said as he entered the room to admire the table.

I saw he was hiding something behind his back.

"What is it, Velvel," she asked, trying to peek around him.

He handed her a package wrapped in a soft cloth. When she opened it tears came to her eyes. "A candleabra. Oh, Velvel, it is beautiful. Where did you get it?"

"From a government official," he answered, pleased that he had made her so happy.

"Oh Velvel," she replied, "you shouldn't have. They'll be suspicious of us if they know we have money." A look of fear passed between them.

"Don't worry, Chava," my father said to reassure her. "He can be trusted."

"None of those people can be trusted," my mother said with hatred.

There were many things I just didn't understand. We seemed to be living very well. We had plenty of food and I knew we must have had plenty of money because I took more and more each week to the station. Why did Mama and Papa still seem scared sometimes?

My father went to the cellar and I went outside to play with Captain, Jacob and Michael. We went to the fort and floated sticks in the little rivers created by the melting snow. We pretended they were ships and we going to faraway places. My ship always went to Bucharest. I talked a lot about going there when I grew up and all the wonderful things I would do.

The sun was low in the sky when I came home. I entered the house and no one seemed to be there. I called loudly but there was no answer. The table was still set and food was cooking on the kitchen stove. Captain ran to the back door and began to bark. I followed and looked out the window. There was a very strange sight.

My Papa, Mama, and my grandparents were in the yard looking at a big black car. It was the most beautiful car I had ever seen. It was shiny and long and black. I ran outside. "Where did this car come from? Is it our? Can we go for a ride? Please, Papa, take me for a ride, please."

"Quiet, Imic," my father said sternly. "This is not our car. The assistant chief of police wants me to keep it for him here in our yard."

"It's a trick," my Mama said, and my grandparents agreed by nodding their heads. My father had a strange look in his eyes, almost as if he were in pain.

"No, it's not a trick," he answered without looking at anyone. "Now everyone go back into the house and don't mention this car to anyone."

"Couldn't I just bring Jacob and Michael over to see the car?" I pleaded.

"No," my father almost shouted. "Get into the house and forget about this car."

I had never seen my father so upset before so I obeyed immediately. My mother and my grandparents followed me. As I entered the house I saw my father covering the car with a big tarpaulin.

"Get dressed, Imic," my mother said. "It's almost time for the Seder to start."

Soon my aunts and uncles and cousins began arriving. Our family was all together. There were so many of us we filled the whole room. We all sat down at the beautiful table.

ON THE MOVE AGAIN

My grandfather sat at the head and my father at the other end. How safe I felt. But my father kept glancing out of the window and seemed to be very nervous.

Wine was poured into the glasses and a special cup of wine was placed in the middle of the table so that the prophet Elijah could enter our home and drink from the cup. My grandfather began the Seder with a blessing. The candles were lit and the Seder had begun. We all read from our Haggadahs, the little booklet that tells the story of Passover. We read about the angel of death passing over the houses of the Jews so that the boy children would be spared. Just as my grandfather was reading the part about Elijah, a know was heard at the door. I was so startled I jumped.

"Is it Elijah?" I whispered.

Everyone's face was frozen with fear except my father's. He arose from his chair and went to the back door.

"Is it time?" he asked a figure we could not see.

He walked slowly back to the table and stood looking at all of us. I noticed Jacob's father, cousin Chaim. He had covered his face with his hands as if he were crying. He must have known what this was all about. No one else seemed to understand.

"Chava," my father spoke in a soft even voice. "Go and pack a suitcase. Put all the gold and jewels that we have in it and some clothes. Only one suitcase. Imic, go and help your mother," he commanded.

I began to cry. I tried not to, but I was scared. "Where are we going, Papa? Who was that man at the door?" I asked in a choking voice.

My mother had not moved. She seemed glued to her chair. Everyone sat silently.

My father, still standing, looked around the table. "Chava, Imic and I must leave Brichen. This afternoon the assistant police chief told me that our business has been discovered. The chief of police knows I am slaughtering cattle and selling the meat. Tomorrow morning his men are coming to take me to Siberia."

Aunt Riva Leah let out a gasp. She had been in Siberia when we had all left before.

My mother got up quickly and began to do as she had been told.

"How did the police find out?" my grandfather asked. "It must have been the assistant police chief."

"No," said my father, wearily. "It doesn't matter how they know, the only thing that matters is that they do know. The rest of you will be safe here. They're only concerned with me. The assistant police chief has arranged for a driver to take us to the Rumanian border in his car. Someone will meet us there and take us where we'll be safe."

"But where will you be, Velvel?" my grandmother asked, crying.

"I'll send word to you when we are settled," he answered, not answering her question.

My cousin Chaim's face was white and tears were falling into his plate in front of him.

"Imic, go and help your mother," my father said firmly. "We only have a little time."

I found my mother hurriedly stuffing things in a suitcase. She pulled me to her when I entered the room. "Oh, Imic," she cried, "when will it end?" A sob caught in her throat. She dried her eyes, and we finished packing and returned to the family. Everyone was crying. My father stood very straight as if he was forcing himself not to cry.

"We must hurry," he kept saying.

I went over to my grandmother and grandfather. They were both sobbing loudly. I hugged them hard, and then mama, papa and I went out through the back door to the waiting car. My mama's face looked as if it were made from stone. But her eyes were filled with fear. She held my hand so hard I felt her fingernails digging into my palm.

A man with a black suit and black cap stood by the open car door. He pulled the back seat up and put our suitcase under the seat. My father handed him a brown cloth sack filled with all of our gold and jewelry. My mother and father were instructed to lie down on the back seat while I got on the floor. Suddenly I jumped up.

"Captain," I cried. "Iforgot Captain." I bolted out of the car and ran to the back porch where Captain stood watching us. He was so silent, just standing there watching as if he knew what was happening.

"Imic," my father loudly whispered, "get into the car. Captain cannot go with us."

I stood rooted to the porch where Captain stood. "No, I won't leave my dog," I cried, "I won't."

My father's voice softened. "Imic, I know you want to take Captain but we can't take a chance like that. You must understand. Someday we will come back and see him. He'll be well cared for while we're gone. Your cousin Jacob will take care of him."

I knew that Jacob would give him good care and that Captain would be safe. I also knew that we would never come back. I put my face against Captain's fur and threw my arms around him. His hot pink tongue licked my tearstained face as I turned to go back to the car.

I got in on the floor again and my mother and father lay down on the back seat. The driver covered us from head to toe with a big rug so that no one would see us as we drove through town.

We were going faster, so we must have already passed through town. I could hear my mother sobbing quietly up above me. The sounds were muffled through the heavy rug. I began to feel very drowsy. I closed my eyes and felt my body relaxing. I could no longer hear my mother sobbing.

It seemed as though I had just closed my eyes when I felt the big car slow down. Suddenly I was wide awake. Fear shot through my body. Had we been discovered? I lay very still trying not to breathe.

I heard voices. The driver was talking to someone. I couldn't hear the words. The car started up again, drove just a little way and then stopped. The car door opened and the rug was taken off us.

I half expected to see the face of the police chief staring at us. With a flood of relief, I saw it was our driver.

"Another car is waiting for you. You are now in Rumania."

My father thanked him, took our suitcase, and we hurried down the road to another car. I looked back and saw a big fence with searchlights and towers behind me. The ~~[illegible]~~ border--we had crossed it.

Wordlessly, we got into the waiting car. A young boy sat in the driver's seat. He didn't look very big, but his face looked very old. He seemed to be waiting for something. My father reached into his coat pocket and pulled out a little brown cloth bag, much smaller than the one he had given before, and handed it to the boy. He immediately examined the contents, nodded his head and started the car.

"I'll take you to the nearest station," he said as he drove. "On track 15 you will take the train for Bucharest. Here are your tickets." He handed a small packet to my father. "Your train arrives early in the morning. You'll be safe there," he concluded.

Bucharest. I was really going to Bucharest. We even had tickets for the train. Ice cream men, movie houses, parks with children playing, a real king with a palace. I was filled with excitement.

BUCHAREST

I didn't sleep much on the train that night; I was much too excited. I listened to the clanging of the wheels and dozed off several times only to awaken each time. When it became light outside I could see the farmhouses that dotted the countryside. I felt disappointed because it looked the same as the country around Brichen. I had expected something very different.

Mama and papa were dozing in their seats. My mama looked so small next to my papa. She opened her eyes as I was looking at her.

"Are we almost there, Mama?" I asked. "Will Aunt Golda and Aunt Ruchel be waiting for us?"

"No, Imic," she replied, "they don't know we're coming to Bucharest. No one knows except the people who arranged for our escape."

"Will they catch us, Mama?" I asked softly.

"No, Imic, Russia has no control over Rumania. We will be safe here," she said quietly. And then added "I hope" very softly, as if she were talking to herself.

I turned again to the window, and I saw that things were beginning to look very different. More and more houses, fewer fields, and people standing by the tracks waving to us. Soon there were factories with big chimneys blowing out smoke and many buildings surrounding them.

"We're getting close now, Imic," my mama said, squeezing my hand.

Off in the distance I could see big beautiful buildings and lots of automobiles crowding the streets. I had never seen so many cars before.

The train came into the station and I couldn't believe my eyes. Hundreds of people were standing around or sitting on benches alongside the tracks. There were lots and lots of trains. I heard loud music playing and saw men and women pushing carts selling all sorts of things.

The three of us stood on the platform for a moment not knowing which way to go. An old man wearing a red cap and jacket approached us.

"You looking for a taxi?"

My father nodded and the man led us down the long platform to the main station. There was so much to see here that I could barely keep up. We pushed through the crowed and went out the front door of the station. The sun was bright and hot. There were at least twenty taxis lined up in front of the station waiting for passengers. The sounds of the city waking up were wonderful. There were no roosters crowing the way they did in Brichen.

"Look, Imic," my father said, pointing, "a man selling ice cream."

I looked and there he was--an old man in a white jacket riding a bicycle with a white cart attached. He was ringing a little bell as he pedaled.

"Oh, Papa, could I have one?" I pleaded.

"So early in the morning, Imic?" my mama laughed.

"Oh, please," I begged.

Papa stopped the man and gave him a coin. He reahced in his little cart and handed me an ice cream on a stick. I held the stick and licked the ice cream. It had a special, delicious taste.

"Oh thank you, Papa," I said, "Bucharest is a wonderful city."

Papa and mama smiled at each other and we got in the taxi. Mama gave the driver Aunt Ruchel's address and we were off.

I had never imagined that Bucharest was such a big city. We sped past hundreds of buildings with stores advertising clothes and furniture and everything that anyone could ever want. And then we were passing a part of the city that was filled with trees.

"What's that?" I asked, pointing to the trees. "A forest in the middle of the city?"

"That's a park, Imic, a park for people to walk in and children to play. See? There are children with hoops there on the path," my mother said.

At last the taxi stopped in front of a big building. It was made from gray stone with many, many windows.

"Why are we stopping, Papa?" I asked.

"This is where your aunts live," re replied.

"This is their house?" I exclaimed.

"No, no, Imic," my mama said patiently. "Not this whole building. This is an apartment house. Many people live in this building."

I couldn't understand what an apartment was. Did all the people live together in this building?

We went inside the big double door and there I saw many doors on each side of the long hall. In the center of the hall was a big thing that looked like a cage. It had bars made out of black iron and a door that also had bars. Before I could ask about it, a young man opened one of the hallway doors and came over to us.

"May I help you?" he asked.

My mama looked down at the floor and papa said Uncle Abrasha's name. The young man pointed up and said, "Third floor, second door."

"Thank you," my father replied and walked toward the big black cage. He opened the door of the cage and motioned for me to get in.

"Why are you going into that cage?" I cried with fear in my voice. "I'm not getting in that cage," I said, and backed away. "We will never get out."

My Papa laughed. "Imic, this is an elevator. We get in and push a button and it will stop on the floor where Aunt Golda lives."

An elevator. I had never even heard that word. How could you just push a button and it would know where to go? But I knew my papa would not tell me to get inside if we couldn't get out.

I grabbed my mother's hand and carefully stepped in. It was true, there were little red buttons with the numbers 1, 2, 3, 4 on them. The door shut, papa let me push the button with number 3 on it and the cage began to move slowly, jerkily upward. I had forgotten my fear by the time it came to a stop. As we stepped out, I looked down and could see all the way to the bottom where we had first come into the building.

"Could we ride in that again, Papa?" I asked. "What do you call it?"

"An elevator, Imic," he answered, smiling. "We will ride it again soon."

We found the second door and papa knocked. The door opened and there stood Aunt Ruchel.

Her face went white when she saw us and after a second she threw her arms around us and began to shout with excitement. "Abrasha, Golda, come quickly."

Soon we were all together. Everyone was hugging and kissing and asking questions, not waiting for an answer.

We were still standing in the hall and other doors began to open. Aunt Ruchel led us all inside and closed the door.

"First we'll eat," she said, "and then we'll talk."

I had forgotten that we hadn't eaten since lunch the day before. Suddenly I was very hungry and very tired.

LIFE IN BUCHAREST

The next few weeks were busy ones for us. We found a place to live, papa found a job and I discovered the movie houses.

We spent the first week with Aunt Ruchel. She was going to have a baby in July so I helped her get things ready for the baby. I had never been around a tiny baby and I was excited to have a new cousin.

Aunt Golda was so beautiful. I loved being with her because she was happy and always laughing. She took me to the park and bought me ice cream, and every afternoon when she got home from her job in the hospital, we would go to the movie house. My favorite movie was about men called cowboys. They rode horses in America and were always fighting with indians. Someday I would go to America and be a cowboy too. I would go to the place called "the Old West" and live on a ranch and ride horses all day.

I didn't see much of Uncle Abrasha. He left early in the morning and came back late at night. He had bought another taxi and my father was a partner with him.

We found a house on the edge of the city near a big park. It was small, but I had my own room. The furniture was old, but very nice. I had a soft bed and a little table with drawers in it and a chest for my clothes.

My mother worked very hard cleaning our new house and cooking. She was still not herself. She cried often and always looked sad. Once I asked her, "Mama, why are you so sad? Bucharest is a wonderful city and Aunt Golda and Aunt Ruchel are here."

"Oh, Imic," she replied, putting her arms around me. "You're too young to understand what it means to be always running away. To leave your family, to always be frightened. I hope someday you'll have roots and not be scared of everything and everyone."

I couldn't quite understand what she meant, but I felt sad for her and tried to comfort her. "I love you, Mama," I whispered. She smiled and hgged me tighter. "Someday," I dontinued, "I will take you to America and we will live on a ranch in the Old West."

"Imic," she managed to laugh, "you've been seeing too many movies. America is a long way away from here. Now I must get dinner cooked before your papa gets home."

It was summertime in Bucharest. All the trees were green and there were flowers everywhere. The women wore gaily colored dresses and big hats. Each morning I would get up very early and have breakfast with my father and mother. Mama would pack a lunch for me, give me some lei and I would catch the streetcar at the corner and go to the movies. I went home only after the afternoon show ended.

Papa had opened a business by this time near our house. He sold the gold and jewelry that we had left and went into partnership with a man named Mr. Topola, who had recently come to Bucharest from Poland. They opened a soap factory. The soap had American names like "My Lady" and "My Darling" and it was sold to stores all over Bucharest.

One night my father came into my room and sat beside me on the bed. "Imic, I know you have a good time going to the movies every day, but I think you're old enough to have a job now. How would you like tow ork in the factory with me?"

"Oh, Papa," I said excitedly, "I would like that very much. Could I go to work with you each day?"

"Yes, my son," he replied, "and I will pay you a salary each week. We will start tomorrow morning."

I was very excited at the thought of a job. I had seen all the movies over and over and I was beginning to get very lonely. There were no other children living around us and I had no one to be with or talk to.

The factory was a short distance from our house and we went there in my father's taxi. He had hired a driver to run the car while he worked. We stopped at the front door and went in. I had never been there before. It had a strangely sweet smell, like perfume. Mr. Topola met us.

"Well, Velvel, this must be our newest employee. Welcome, Imic, to the factory," Mr. Topola said as he shook my hand. I beamed and returned his handshake and tried to make myself look very tall.

My father took me around and introduced me to the other workers. Then he took me into a big room with great wooden tubs filled with a clear liquid. The perfume smell in the room was so strong it made me sick. I began to gag and had to run out.

"I'm sorry, Papa," I said feeling ashamed.

"You'll get used to it, Imic. It's only bad at first," he replied. "Your job will be to take the bars of soap when they come out of the machine and dip them into the big vats of perfume. The pink bars go into vat number one and the white bars into vat number two."

"Papa," I asked innocently, "won't the perfume come off when people use the soap to wash themselves?"

He looked down and didn't answer me. "Come along, Imic, it's time to go to work," he said.

I managed only to breathe through my mouth so that I couldn't smell the perfume. Papa gave me a big apron to wear over my clothes and I worked all day dipping the soap into the perfume. By the end of the day I could breathe through my nose and the smell didn't bother me.

Papa came to fetch me and we went downstairs to our waiting taxi. The driver handed papa a bag filled with money and papa checked the amount against the record of the day. After that, we drove home. I was so tired that I went right to my room and went to bed.

Each day we repeated the same routine. I was getting very good at my job. Mr. Topola said I was one of the fastest workers he had ever seen. I felt very happy inside and papa smiled.

My aunts came to visit us often. Aunt Ruchel was very big and walked very slowly. Aunt Golda always brought me a surprise. One night there was another man besides my uncle with them. I had seen him somewhere before. He was young and very handsome, and he never took his eyes away from Aunt Golda. Suddenly I remembered him. He was the man in their building who first told us where my aunt's apartment was.

"Imic," Aunt Golda said, "this is Willy Zisser."

"Hellow," I said shyly, afraid to shake hands with him because mine smelled of perfume.

"Velvel, Chava, Imic, come sit down," my Aunt Ruchel said. "We have exciting news."

We came close and sat around Golda and Mr. Zisser.

Aunt Ruchel continued. "Willy and Golda want to get married in the fall." She smiled and looked to my father for consent. "We came to tell you, Velvel, since you are the oldest and papa is no longer with us."

There was a moment's silence as if everyone were suddenly remembering the war. Then my father spoke.

"Well, Mr. Zisser, can you support our little Golda?"

"Yes, sir," Mr. Zisser replied. "I am involved in several businesses. I care for Golda very much and I am sure I will make her a good husband." He and Golda looked fondly at each other. She gently touched his hand.

"Do your parents approve?" my father asked.

"My parents were killed during the war working for the underground," Mr. Zisser said.

"I'm sorry, lad," my father replied.

My father stood up and hugged Mr. Zisser and then kissed Golda. "Welcome to the Raboi family, Willy," he said.

Mama brought out a decanter of wine and I was allowed to have a glass to celebrate the occasion.

"When will the wedding be?" my father asked.

"Well, sir," Willy said, "we would like to be married after Yom Kipper, in October, if you please?"

Everybody agreed that this would be a good time.

I had a strange feeling, like a little pain, in my chest. I wasn't sure I wanted Aunt Golda to marry Willy Zisser or to marry anyone. She was my friend. Now she would have someone else to go with her to the park and to the movies and to buy ice cream. She came over to me as if she knew what I was thinking.

"Imic, you and I will still do all the things we always did and even more. You are still my friend and now Willy will be your friend too." I smiled and secretly wondered if Willy would be my friend or not. We would have to wait and see about that. But I shook my head in agreement and accepted Aunt Golda's hug.

Aunt Ruchel stood up. "I have another surprise tonight. This one is for you, Imic."

"For me?" I asked curiously. I looked at mama and papa and they were smiling. They knew the surprise--I could tell from their faces.

"Yes, Imic. Your Uncle Abrasha and I have arranged for you to go to a summer camp in Mamaya."

I just sat there wondering what I should say or do. What was "a summer camp?" Where was Mamaya? Why were they sending me away?

"Oh, Imic," Aunt Ruchel said. "Aren't you happy? We all thought you would be so excited!"

"I don't know what a summer camp is," I said, embarrassed that I didn't understand.

Everyone laughed and Aunt Golda explained. "Imic, a summer camp is a place where children play all day. You can swim and play games, and ride horses and make lots of new friends. This camp is near the Black Sea in the city of Mamaya."

"You mean the children just play all day and there is no work?" I asked. "Where do the children live and who is there to cook the food and--"

Mama interrupted my questioning. "This is a special camp, Imic. It's run by the Shomer Hatzaier, a Zionist youth movement. I belonged to that group when I was a young girl. In their camp you will learn about a country called Palestine where Jews can live in peace. There will be people there who'll teach you many things."

"It sounds wonderful," I lied. I didn't want to be sent away from home. I'm sure it would be fun to ride horses and swim in the Black Sea, but who would do my job at the soap factory? I would be needed when Aunt Ruchel's baby arrived. I looked at the faces in the room. Everyone looked so happy about Aunt Ruchel's surprise but me.

"It will be wonderful, Imic," Aunt Ruchel said. "You leave tomorrow, so you better get a good night's sleep."

"Tomorrow," I said almost to myself.

I went to my room after dinner to decide what to do. As soon as I was alone, the tears came. The camp lasted two weeks. I wouldn't see mama and papa for two weeks. How could they do this to me? Didn't they care about me? Why were they so pleased about Aunt Ruchel's gift to me? I wouldn't go, I decided. I'd run away and come back after the train for camp left. I began to open my drawers and take out the few clothes that I had.

Where could I go? This wasn't Brichen where I know the countryside and the farmers, this was Bucharest. I know no one except the people at the soap factory. They would tell papa it I went to them.

Suddenly I knew what to do. I would get up very early and go to the street where the movie houses were. I could go to the movies all day and come home late at night--after the train to camp had left. It would be too late for me to go then.

There was a light knock at my door. Aunt Golda came into my room ~~and~~ before I had a chance to speak. She walked over to me and put her arms around me. I couldn't hold back the tears.

"Ah, Aunt Golda," I cried, "please don't let them send me away. I must stay here and help papa at the factory and what will Mama do without me? She'll be so lonely." I cried harder now.

Aunt Golda smiled her wonderful smile and said quietly, "My little Imic, I know you are scared of leaving and being gone for such a long time. But you know we all love you. We'll miss you very much. But we also think that you should be with other children and find out about Palestine and learn to swim and ride horses and go on hikes. You'll even learn how to carve little animals out of wood. You could make a present for me while you're there. I'll write to you every day and even send you cookies sometimes. Your mama and papa want very much for you to go and have a good time. I know you want them to be happy."

I listened to Aunt Golda and suddenly I felt much better. Maybe it wouldn't be so bad after all. "Would I really learn to carve things out of wood?" I asked.

"Yes," Aunt Golda replied with a big smile. "Now, let's get your clothes packed!" Together we found a suitcase and put my clothes in it.

"I have a little present for you to take along, Imic," she said when we were finished. She handed me a gaily wrapped box. Inside was a beautiful blue leather case with white writing paper and a real ink fountain pen. I touched the leather folder lovingly and looked at Aunt Golda. "Now I can write to you every day too," I said.

She hugged me again. "Off to bed with you, and sleep well." She tucked the covers around me, kissed me gently on the forehead, turned off the light and tiptoed out of my room.

SUMMER CAMP

The next morning we arose very early and went to the train station. Papa carried my suitcase and I carried my present from Aunt Golda. Aunt Ruchel, Uncle Abrasha, Aunt Golda and Willy were already there. There were lots of other children at the station and more were arriving. There were shouts of joy as they saw each other. Everyone seemed to know everyone else. I held Papa's hand and we walked over to where all the children were standing. A young man stood in the center of the group. He was about the same age as Willy Zisser and very handsome. He held a clipboard in his hand and was wearing a scarf around his neck and a hat with the words "Shaomer Hatzier" stamped on it. I noticed a lot of the other children had on the same scarf and hat. I looked at my own clothes and felt very left out. Everything I had smelled of perfume. I was suddenly embarrassed. But there was no getting away now.

The young man read names from the list in his hand. Suddenly I heard my own name.

"That's you, Imic," my mama said. "Time to get on the train."

Was I going to burst into tears? I felt like I was, but I knew I couldn't do that. I accepted all the hugs and kisses from everyone. Papa was helping me get on the train and handing me my suitcase. Mama put a bag of food in my hand. I waved goodbye from the steps and then other children were pushing me and I couldn't see my parents anymore. I found an empty seat next to a big boy and sat down. I looked out the window to find my parents and aunts, but they were lost in the corwd.

"Hello," the boy sitting next to me said. "My name is Vadim. What's yours?"

"I am Imic," I said shyly.

"Shake." He held out his hand. When I held out mine he said loudly, "You smell like a girl. Hey look, Imic here smells like a girl."

Several children turned around in their seats and began to laugh. I tried to explain about the perfume but at that moment the young man who had called my name was standing in the aisle by my seat. "Is Imic Raboi in this car?" he asked.

"Yes sir," I replied, very frightened.

"You're in the wrong car, Imic. This is the senior group. I'll take you to the junior group," he said, taking my suitcase.

Vadim looked sneeringly at me. "See you at camp, girlie?"

I could feel everyone's eyes watching me as I moved through the car. I clutched my leather folder and my sack of food and looked down at my feet as I followed the young man.

The children in the next car looked different. They were very quiet and none of them wore a scarf or a hat. They looked just like me. I realized that they had never been to this camp before either and they were scared.

"Sorry about getting you in the wrong car, my boy," the man said. "By the way, my name is Yakov and I'm in charge of the camp." I nodded and slid into the seat he pointed to. I was sitting next to a girl who looked about my age. She was staring down at her hands and her eyes were red from crying. She glanced at me and turned her eyes away.

The train began to move. I looked out the window and caught sight of my mama. She was searching each window for me. I waved furiously and at last she saw me. "The bag," she shouted, "look in the sack." And then the crowd was behind us and we were on our way.

I looked into the bag and saw a red scarf like the other children wore. I tied it around my neck and turned to the girl sitting next to me. "Hello," I said quietly. My name is Imic Raboi. What's yours?"

"Mariam," she replied softly. "Mariam Weisman." She looked so sad and lonely.

"Have you been to camp before?" I asked.

She shook her head firmly and looked as if she were goint to cry.

"Me neither," I said. "But it's going to be fun. We'll swim and hike and ride horses and even learn to carve little animals out of wood."

"I'm scared," she said, still not looking at me. "I never left my parents before."

"Well, it's only for two weeks," I said confidently. "And that's not very long."

"What's that?" Mariam pointed to my leather folder.

I opened it for her to see my new writing tablet and fountain pen. I wrote my name on the paper and offered her the pen. "See," I said, "it's for writing letters. My Aunt Golda gave it to me. Here, do you want to try writing?"

She took the pen and I saw her begin to smile. She wrote her name above mine and gave me back the pen. "That's very nice," she said, looking at me. "If you haven't been to camp before, where did you get that scarf?"

"My mama gave it to me," I replied. "She was a member of Shomer Hatzaier when she was a young girl." I was very proud of that. "You'll get one too, Mariam, when you get to camp," I said, trying to sound very sure. "You'll see, we'll have lots of fun." Mariam was smiling and the redness was disappearing from her eyes.

We were a long way from Bucharest and the scenery was changing very fast. There were beautiful big trees all around us and high mountains on either side.

Yakov brought rolls, cheese and fruit. He said that in another hour we would be near the camp and taught us a song that we would sing there each day. Mariam was singing and smiling now and I felt better too.

"There's the sea," someone in front of me shouted. Mariam and I both looked out the window and there it was. But the Black Sea wasn't black at all. It was a light bluish-green color with white sand all along the shore. Big waves with whitecaps hit the sand and went back out again. I had never seen anything like it. There was more water here than anywhere, and so beautiful. Mariam and I stared at the sea without saying a word. Soon we felt the train stopping.

Yakov announced that we had arrived in Mamaya and from here we would take a bus to the camp. On the platform I saw Vadim waiting to get on the bus. He spotted me and shouted, "Hey girl, you sure smell nice." He laughed loudly and began to hit the boy next to him on the back. I looked the other way. I didn't like him. More than that, I was afraid of him.

The bus for the juniors drove up and we all scrambled on. Mariam and I got a seat together at the back of the bus. She looked very scared and sad again. I smiled my bravest smile and she smiled a tiny smile back.

The bus drove off on a road beside the sea. Within a short time we had arrived at the camp. I wasn't prepared for what I saw. It was a big hotel across the road from the beach. On one side was a dense forest and on the other, mountains that rose high above the hotel. "It's beautiful," Mariam sighed. "Like something out of a storybook."

The building was made of grayish stone, with a red-tiled roof and big windows across the front. There were tall columns from the ground to the roof and flowers everywhere. The doors were made of heavy carved wood.

We followed Yakov into the main room. It was very cool inside. The floors were made of brick covered with gaily woven rugs. The walls were white and very thick. A huge fireplace was at one end of the room and comfortable chairs and sofas all around the floor. I had never seen a place like this before. The look on Mariam's face told me she never had either.

"Attention, boys and girls," Yakov's voice boomed. "Welcome to camp. Listen carefully for your room assignments and today's schedule."

We were divided into groups of four. I looked shyly at the other three boys in my group. They looked about my age and size.

"Go to your rooms with your counselor. It's now 2:00. At 4:00 we will meet again right here and go for a swim. After that, please change clothes and at 5:30 we'll have dinner in the main dining hall." Yakov nodded to a group of young men and women standing along the side of the room. "These are your counselors. They'll show you to your rooms."

My counselor's name was Schmuel. He wore the now-familiar red hat and red scarf. He looked rather small but very nice. "Come, boys," he motioned to the four of us standing in a group. "This way, please."

We walked down a long hall and stopped in front of room twelve. Inside were four cots and some shelves. The room was small but very clean and fresh. Schmuel's room was next to ours.

"Now, boys, get unpacked. Then we'll go for a swim. Who knows how to swim?" he asked.

Each of us looked at the other. One boy shyly raised his hand. "I went once a long time ago," the boy replied.

"What's your name?" Schmuel asked.

"Hersch," the boy replied.

"And yours?" Schmuel questioned as he pointed to each of us.

The three of us introduced ourselves. Besides Hersch and me, there was David and Michael.

When Schmuel left the room David turned to me. "Imic, do you have a bathing suit?"

"Do you?" I asked.

"No," David replied.

"Neither do I," I said with relief. None of us had a bathing suit. We all wondered what to do next.

Schmuel returned. "What's wrong, boys? Why aren't you ready for swimming?"

"We don't have bathing suits," I said, embarrassed.

"Wait here," Schmuel said. He returned in a moment carrying four swimsuits. "Here you are," he said gaily, and tossed them on my bed.

We grabbed the suits and put them on.

We went our and walked to the sea. It was beautiful. Suddenly we felt the cold water on our feet. I grabbed Michael and David's hands and we began to jump up and down and splash the sea water all over each other.

For the next hour, Schmuel taught us to hold our breath, put our head under the water and to kick our feet. We were all laughing, lying on the warm white sand to rest after our time in the sea.

Suddenly I felt a spray of sand hit my face. "It's my old friend Imic," a voice said above me. I opened my eyes just in time to see Vadim throw another handful of sand in my face.

David, Hersch and Michael all looked at me and then at Vadim. I thought for a minute that I would cry, but instead I stood up and faced him. He towered over me, his hands on his hips and a sneer on his face. I stood staring at him. He came at me and pushed me down, laughing.

Something happened inside of me. A feeling of rage came into my throat and anger overwhelmed me. I scrambled to my feet and dove at his legs. He was so surprised, he fell over backwards. I jumped on him and began to pound his body with my fists. I kicked him and scratched and hit him. Finally someone pulled me off and held my still0waving arms behind me.

"Enough, Imic," I heard Schmuel's voice.

I looked at Vadim. He was rubbing his arms and legs and getting to his feet. A strange look came into his eyes, almost a look of disbelief. He scratched his head and held out his hand and said, "Shake."

Schmuel let go of my arms and I held out my hand.

We shook hands and Vadim said, "You're a fighter, all right," and then he walked away.

Hersch, David and Michael crowded around me and began patting me on the back and shaking my hand.

Schmuel said, "It's about time somebody put that bully Vadim in his place. He comes every summer and finds someone to push around. You taught him a good lesson, Imic."

I felt very good and I especially liked the fact that the other boys looked at me with envy.

"Where did you learn to fight like that, Imic?" Hersch asked.

I just smiled and didn't answer. I couldn't tell them that this was the first time I had ever fought. I was even surprised at myself.

"Time to go in and change for dinner, boys," Yakov shouted to all of us. He walked over to me and put his hand on my shoulder.

"Say, Imic, I hear you really showed Vadim a good fight today. You know, fighting isn't usually the best way to handle things, but sometimes it's the only way." He smiled and walked away.

Dinner tasted so good that night. The train ride and swim and all the excitement gave me quite an appetite. I liked meeting all the other boys and girls. Hersch, David and Michael seemed like old friends now. Vadim waved to me during dinner. I saw Mariam across the dining hall sitting at a table with several other girls talking and laughing. She looked as if she were also having a good time.

After dinner we followed Yakov outside and found ourselves in a huge clearing in the woods. The night was dark and the stars and moon were our only light. I looked up at the sky and saw more stars than I had ever seen before. In the center of the clearing many logs and sticks were piled high. After we were all seated, Yakov lit the logs and a huge flame arose. We all moved back a little from the fire, and sat very close together. Mariam and I were sitting side by side.

Yakov began to sing the song we had learned on the train. We all joined in and soon the night was filled with all of our voices. When we were all quiet, Yakov began speaking.

"Boys and girls, I want to tell you a true story. It can happen to all of you here. It's about a land not so far away, a land called Palestine. This country is very old. For many thousands of years our people have lived there. Someday we will all return there to live as free people. Everyone will have an equal share of land. There will be no rich men or poor men. All will be equal. As farmers we'll plow the fields and harvest the crops and reap the earth's riches. We will live in communities called Kibbutzim, and each of us will own an equal share of the community. We will share the land, the food, and the work. We will all be free and we will rule ourselves. We must all work to go to Palestine."

I had never heard of these things before. Yakov talked about us being farmers. The only farmers I ever knew were the non-Jews who lived in the countryside. My father always said they were uneducated, and could do nothing else but farm. Jews as farmers? I couldn't believe it.

Yakov was still speaking. "You must train yourself to be strong and to endure many hardships. You will go to Palestine and learn to reclaim the land. From swamps you will have orange groves. From deserts, a cool, green valley. It will be a land of milk and honey and each of you will own it."

Yakov then talked about the evils of the rich and the sadness of the poor. I thought about my father making money in the soap factory and slaughtering cattle in Brichen. Was that so wrong, to make a lot of money? Was my father an evil man?

Yakov went on with his story about Palestine. I could almost see the picture he was painting with his words. A beautiful land filled with happy people--people who were Jews like me, people unafraid, people who no longer had to run away and be scared. Mama had spoken about this. She said she hoped someday we would no longer be afraid and have to hide and that we would have roots. Palestine must have been the place she was thinking of. Suddenly, I wanted desperately to see her and tell her that I knew where we could go. I would write to her as soon as I got back to the room.

Yakov was now singing with the other counselors and dancing around the campfire. They all held hands and danced in a circle around the fire. One by one, holding hands, all of us joined in the dance.

I was filled with the strangest feeling. I felt like this was exactly what I was supposed to be doing. My eyes filled with tears. Not because I was sad. For the first time that I could ever remember, I was very happy.

KING MICHAEL ABDICATES

The days were filled with many activities. We rode horses, went on long hikes into the forest, swam in the sea, and learned many things about living on a Kibbutz and about farming. We learned which crops to plant for each season, how to plow fields and how to harvest. We sang songs in Hebrew and danced each night around the campfire.

I wrote a letter each day to Mama and Papa, and one to Aunt Golda. My letters were filled with the wonders of Palestine, and how someday we would all go there and be free and unafraid. I sent Aunt Golda the words to one of the songs we had learned that was my favorite. It was about how "nations shall learn war no more and into ploughshares beat their swords and all men will be brothers and walk hand in hand through the free land."

Mariam and I spent many hours together talking about Palestine and how we would go there and be happy and never afraid again.

Mariam and her family had come to Bucharest from a town in Russia not far from Brichen. Her older brother had been killed in Siberia where he was taken during the war. She and her parents had hidden with a non-Jewish family for a while, and then they were discovered and sent to the labor camps. She said she had never told anyone about it before, but she told me because I was her best friend. I also told her things I had never told anyone, about Manya and about the time Mama and I had gone looking for my father, and even about my job with Anna in Brichen. It was so good to have a best friend again.

On the seventh day of camp, we got up as usual, but I noticed immediately that Schmuel's door was open and he was not in his bed. He was always the last to wake up. The other boys followed my look and David said, "Where is Schmuel? He's always asleep at this hour. I wonder if anything is wrong."

"He probably just woke up early for a change," Michael said.

"It does seem strange that he wouldn't at least have waited for us," I said.

Just then Schmuel and Yakov entered our room, their faces very white. Yakov looked as if he hadn't slept at all.

"What's wrong?" I asked hesitantly.

"Boys," Yakov began, "I have some very bad news for you. Last night, King Michael abdicated the throne and has left the country. The Communist Party headed by Petru Groza has taken over and Rumanian money has been devalued. We have no money to buy food or to run the camp. All of us must return to Bucharest immediately." Yakov left the room in a hurry. Schmuel remained with us.

"I don't understand, Schmuel," I said. "What does all this mean? What does 'abdicate' mean? And who is Mr. Petru Groza? Is he a bad person?"

Schmuel addressed us all. "We don't really know very much about what happened. The Communists have tried for a long time to get rid of King Michael so that the people could rule the country. It has finally happened. When things settle down, we feel that the change will be very good for Rumania. The people will all have an equal share. Thebad part is that right now things are all confused and we have no money to continue running the camp."

It seemed to me that things probably wouldn't be so bad if everyone could have an equal share--I mean, that was what we had been learning all week about how life was in Palestine, and why shouldn't it work in Bucharest? Still, I wasn't sure what would happen to us now because when the Communists came to Brichen, it wasn't good. Everyone was afraid and that's when my father had to slaughter cattle in the cellar, and the words "black market" were used a lot. But maybe what we had been taught about Palestine was a different type of equality. I hoped so. I wouldn't want Palestine to be like Brichen because nobody was equal there, especially the Jews. I wondered if we would have to run away again. I could still see my mother's face as we left Brichen. I hoped it wouldn't happen again.

We packed in a hurry and headed downstairs. No one talked much. Everyone seemed confused. We were each handed a left-over dinner roll to eat as we boarded the bus that would take us to the train.

Mariam and I sat silently all the way to Mamaya. Several children were crying but most were very quiet.

When we arrived at the station there were so many people ahead of us I was afraid we would never by able to get on the train. Then I realized the old tickets would be no good anymore and that we had no money to buy new ones with. I felt very frightened.

Yakov jumped down from the bus and told us to wait. I had not expected to see so many people pushing and shoving trying to get into the station. I was very scared. I looked around at all my new friends. Some of the children were still crying and others were leaning out of the windows as if trying to understand what was happening. I looked over at Vadim. His face was filled with fear and his hands were held together so tightly the knuckles were white. I took Mariam's ice-cold hand in mine. Her eyes were filled with tears.

"Oh, Imic," she whispered, "I'm so afraid. What if they won't let us on the train and we can never get home to Bucharest?"

I cleared my throat, fighting back my own tears. "Yakov will know what to do," I said, not really believing what I was saying. "They will have to let us on the train."

Finally Yakov returned to the bus. His face was very red and his clothes were wet from sweat. "Don't be frightened, my little ones," he said soothingly. "You will all be able to get on the train. I convinced the man in charge of the station that Shomer Hatzaier was not opposed to Petru Groza and he is making room for all of you on the train. Each of you get your suitcase and come with me. I hope by next summer we will all meet again--in Palestine, perhaps."

We stayed behind Yakov, not daring to let go of one another for fear of getting lost. I held Mariam's hand tightly and we pushed past people until the train was in sight. I was more confused than ever. I didn't understand communism--Yakov kept saying something about socialism for Palestine, not communism, but somehow everything was all mixed up for me. I just wanted to be in our little house with my mama and papa. I wanted to see Aunt Ruchel and Aunt Golda. I just wanted to go home.

PETRU GROZA

The streets of Bucharest were filled with people. Huge banners were flying with the name PETRU GROZA written on them. People were carrying signs with Petru Groza's name in big letters. A big parade of men in uniform went by, each was waving a red flag. There were even some children marching and carrying red flags. People were fighting in the streets. The whole city seemed to be filled with confusion.

A huge crowd awaited our train. I wondered how I would get home--mama and papa were't expecting me for another week.

The train was stopping now and I could hear people shouting "Petru Groza!" over and over like a chant.

Mariam and I looked at each other. "Goodbye, Imic," she said, and squeezed my hand. "I'll see you again sometime. Thank you for being my friend." She smiled.

I smiled back and squeezed her hand. "I'll write you a letter soon, Mariam," I said. "I'll miss you." We stepped down from the train and I lost sight of her right away.

The first person I saw was Papa. I ran to him and he picked me up and held me tightly. All of the tears that had tried to come out all day suddenly came spilling out all over my papa's coat. "Imic, Imic," he whispered, "don't cry, everything is all right now. I'm here."

He put me down gently, picked up my suitcase, held my hand and led me through the crowd to the front of the station. There the taxi that papa owned waited with the driver behind the wheel.

We got in and drove away, weaving in and out of the crowds. Most of the streets were blocked off and filled with screaming, cheering people.

"Where did King Michael go, Papa?" I asked.

"No one knows for sure, Imic. Some say he went to America."

We were passing the big palace. All across the front was a banner that read "The Peoples Republic of Rumania." A large picture of a man was being lifted to hang from the roof. Under the picture was "Petru Groza." He looked very ugly to me. He wore a black beard and glasses and he had a mean look. People standing around the palace cheered as the picture was hung. I tried to ask Papa several questions but he seemed far away, as if his mind was busy with something else.

At last we were home. Mama ran to me, hugging and kissing me, tears running down her face. "Imic, Imic," she said. "At last you're here. I missed you so much." We walked inside and a delicious smell filled the air.

"Mama," I said, "I'm hungry."

The table was set and mama began to bring out plates and bowls of food. We all ate without saying much. I had so much to tell them, but suddenly I was very tired. I left the table and went into my room. Was it possible that I had only been gone a week? It seemed much longer. I lay down on my bed.

When I awoke, the sky was dark. I had been asleep all afternoon. I got up quickly and went into the other room.

"Well, Imic," my mama said, "you had a long sleep. You were very tired, my son. Your Aunt Golda and Aunt Ruchel and Uncle Abrasha will be over to hear all about camp."

Very soon there was a knock at the door and my aunts and uncle had arrived. They hugged and kissed me, and Aunt Golda was asking endless questions.

"Oh, Imic," she said, "we want to hear all about the camp and everything you did there."

I told them all about Yakov, and Schmuel and Mariam. I did not talk about my fight with Vadim because I knew mama would not like it if she thought I had been in a fight. I also told them my feelings about Palestine, and how I thought we should go there because we would all be free and we would learn to grow our own food and everything would be equal. I stopped talking to catch my breath.

"Imic," my mama said, "what big dreams you have. I used to want the same thing when I was a girl. All the songs we used to sing and the dances we did and the wonderful stories about the land of milk and honey. Palestine is a long way from here, and who knows what will happen. Come, let's eat now." She stood and we followowd her to the table. Once again, the table was filled with good-smelling bowls of food. Mama had fixed my favorite things tonight. As we ate the talk turned to the takeover of the Communists and Mr. Petru Groza.

Papa said, "I'm worried about this situation. I saw it happen in Brichen. The companies and factories will be nationalized, and we'll have to be involved in the black market again."

"Velvel, I don't think we should discuss this in front of Imic," my Mama said cautiously.

"Oh please, Mama, let me hear. I want to know what's happening. Please, there are many things I don't understand and I'm old enough to know."

"Imic's right, Chava," Aunt Ruchel said. "He has seen and heard so much already in his life that he should be told what is happening here in Rumania."

Uncle Abrasha spoke. "There are state-owned taxis on the street already. We will have a hard time keeping our taxis, Velvel."

"Take them off the street for a while, Abrasha, until we see what is going to happen," my father replied.

"The soap factory is small," my father went on. "I'll run it as long as I can. The small factories will take longer to close or to nationalize."

"Someday in the near future, we will have to leave here," Aunt Golda said. "Willy says he believes we should go to Palestine. He says that Palestine is someday going to be a national homeland for the Jewish people."

"Your Willy is also a dreamer," my mother said with sadness.

"Have you given up your dreams, Chava?" Aunt Golda said sharply.

"No, Golda," she answered. "I'm just tired of running. Poor Imic has not had a real home since he was a very small boy. I just don't want to have to leave again."

There was silence in the small room. Finally I spoke. "But Mama, I want to go to Palestine. And I want you and Papa and all of our family to go to Palestine. I think Willy is right. It will be our homeland someday."

"We shall see," my mother said. "But now it's time for you to go to bed, Imic. It's getting very late."

"I'm not tired, Mama," I said. "Please let me stay up longer."

"Remember, Imic," my father interrupted. "You have your job to return to tomorrow."

I had forgotten about my job at the factory. I had finally gotten all the perfume smell off my hands. The salty water of the Black Sea had done that. But I missed the people at the factory and I would be glad to see them again.

"All right, Papa, I'll see you in the morning," I said, and I kissed everyone goodnight.

I went to my room and got ready for bed. I lay quietly and listened to the adults talking about Petru Groza and the Communists and what would happen to us. Uncle Abrasha was speaking.

"I am very worried about the takeover here in Bucharest. I don't believe all the propaganda about the 'peoples republic.' Everything will become state-owned. Soon even the food markets will have nothing to sell, because now that the money is no good the markets can't buy food from the farmers to sell to the people. After Ruchel has the baby, I think we should begin to make plans to go to Palestine."

Aunt Ruchel had been very quiet all evening. "I'm afraid, Abrasha," she said very softly. "The British are stopping immigration to Palestine. We would have to enter the country illegally. With a small baby, we might not make it." She began to cry quietly.

"Don't worry, Ruchel," my father said. "I hear there are many people who help Jews go to Palestine. Hundreds are getting in every day. Besides, things there will change eventually. I think we should wait and not make any definite plans yet. You just worry now about getting a lot of rest and having a big strong, healthy baby. We will decide what to do after Golda and Willy are married. Does everyone agree?"

I guess everyone agreed with Papa, because the women began talking about Aunt Ruchel's baby and Aunt Golda's wedding. I was excited just to think about the new baby coming, and I had never been to a real wedding before. I had a lot to look forward to.

BABY MARIAM

Each day another big company in Bucharest closed to prepare for the state to take over. Papa told me that the richest men were now among the poorest. But we went to work each day as usual. No one had bothered with us yet. I guess we weren't a big enough factory for the state to worry about.

The department stores along the main streets were closed and even the big food markets were closing. Uncle Abrasha must have been right about their not having money to buy food from the farmers. Papa was smart, though. He had made arrangements for the farmers who sold us the fat back for the soap also to sell us food. We had plenty of food stored in our house, but I didn't know how long it would last.

The government began to issue little books of tickets to everyone. The ration tickets could be exchanged for food, clothes and gasoline. There weren't many cars out because there were only certain days when you could buy gasoline.

Papa and Uncle Abrasha kept their taxis off the streets for the first three weeks and then began to run them only after dark. They had not been caught yet.

The streets were all poorly lit at night. I could remember how bright the lights had been when we first came here, and now everything seemed so dull. The ladies no longer wore gaily colored dresses and there were no pretty things for sale in the shops. Everybody wore gray and drab-colored clothes. Even the movie houses were closed down. If this is what happend when everyone was equal, I wan't sure that I liked it.

Aunt Ruchel was supposed to have her baby any day. Mama would go to her apartment each morning and stay with her while Papa and I went to work.

During this time I received a letter from Mariam. I recognized the handwriting immediately. It was very neat, just like Mariam herself.

> Dear Imic,
>
> How are you? I am fine, but it seems strange to be here in Bucharest and not at camp. I have no one to talk to anymore. My parents are very upset about what has happend with Mr. Petru Groza and they never talk to me about it. My father is sure that the shoe store will be closed. I heard my mother crying the other day, but when I asked her what was wrong, she only said, You're too young to understand. I am not too young, but they won't listen. I tried to tell them about Palestine, and how we could go there and be free but they don't understand. I am very lonely, Imic, and you are the only person who I can tell all of this to. You understand, don't you?
>
> Will you write me a letter, Imic, and tell me what I should do—please! I wish we were back at camp and none of this had ever happened. Please answer this letter.
>
> Your friend always,
>
> Mariam Weisman

I felt so sorry for poor little Mariam. At least my parents told me what was happening.

I wrote Mariam a letter explaining to her what I knew of the situation. I told her what Papa had said about the big companies closing first and that the little stores would be the last. I tried to let her know that she shouldn't worry, that someday we would all meet in Palestine and be free. I finished the letter but still I wondered if what I had written was true. I wasn't really sure about Palestine anymore. Each day we heard about more and more Jews being captured by the British and being sent away from Palestine. Many of them were being sent to the island of Cyprus in the Mediterranean Sea, then to a place that was like a prison. I couldn't stand the thought of having to ever return to one of those places. It seemed strange that it was also called a "camp." I had nightmares about what it was like for me when we were all in that camp: when I was so sick and my grandparents died. Never, would I go back to one of those places where people were crowded together like animals. I would run away and hide first. I would not go there again. I sealed the letter and put it on my dresser. Just then, there was a knock on the front door. I heard my mother's voice saying excitedly, "Yes, yes, I'll come. Wait for me."

"Where are you going, Mama?" I said.

"It's Aunt Ruchel's time, Imic. It's time for the baby," she said as she was leaving. "Tell Papa we are at the hospital."

"Can I come too?"

"Wait for your Papa. He'll be here soon." She closed the door behind her.

The baby, it was time for the baby. I was so excited. I tried to imagine what it would be. I had seen calves being born and I wondered if children were born the same way. Oh, how I wished I could go along and see for myself, but I would wait for Papa to come home. Usually Papa and I came home together, but tonight he had sent me home with the driver so that he and Mr. Topola could do some paperwork.

I went outside to wait for him. As soon as I saw the car, I ran toward it. "Papa, Papa," I screamed, "Aunt Ruchel is having a baby. We must hurry. Mama has already gone."

Papa grinned. "Well, come on, Imic, get in. Let's go to the hospital."

The only hospital I had every seen was the one my papa had been in during the war, and it didn't look like this one. The building was old and made of gray stone. A big new sign hung across the entrance that announced the hospital was called the People's Republic of Rumania Hospital.

We went though the main entrance. The hall had a funny smell and it seemed dark. Papa asked a lady at the small desk about Aunt Ruchel, and she pointed down a hall. There we found another desk with a middle-aged woman.

"Please, madam," my father said, "we are looking for my sister Ruchel. She is having a baby. Where is she, please?"

"I don't have information here. I can only direct you to the information office." The lady sounded bored.

"Where is that?"

"Over there--two doors down."

The door was open but the office was empty. We went inside and waited, but no one came. Papa was getting very nervous. He kept clasping and unclasping his hands and looking out in the hall. Finally he said, "Come on, Imic, we'll find her ourselves."

We went out into the hall and went in the opposite direction from the desk. We saw no one. The hospital seemed to be empty. We went down another hall and up a flight of stairs. On that floor we saw a door marked "Maternity."

"This must be it, Imic," Papa said breathlessly. He pushed the double doors open.

A young woman in a uniform met us in the hall. "What do you want?"

"Please, we are looking for my sister, Ruchel Scherf. She is here having a baby."

"This is Delivery," she said quickly, and walked away.

"What does that mean, Papa?" I asked. "Has the baby come?"

"Soon, Imic," Papa answered.

Just then Mama, Aunt Golda and Uncle Abrasha came out of one of the rooms. Uncle Abrasha looked very pale and white. I became frightened. Suddenly from another room I heard a woman's scream. She was shouting for God to make the pain stop. Mama came to me and held my hand.

"It won't be long now," she said, smiling. I didn't understand why she wasn't frightened with all the screaming that Ikept hearing.

"Why are all those ladies screaming?" I asked, listening to one scream after another coming from behind the closed doors. "Are they hurt? Does it hurt to have a baby, Mama?"

"Yes, Imic, it does hurt," Mama answered. "But the pain is soon forgotten."

I couldn't understand why anyone would want to have a baby if it hurt so much.

A man wearing a white coat came over to us. "Mr. Scherf," he said to Uncle Abrasha, "I am Dr. Gescu. Your wife is fine and you have a healthy baby girl." He smiled at Uncle Abrasha and shook his hand.

Aunt Golda, Mama dnd Papa congratulated Uncle Abrasha. They were all so excited.

Mama led the way, and we went downstairs to another floor. We stopped in front of a big glass window filled with tiny little beds. In each bed was a baby. I had never seen anything like it before. Who did all those little babies belong to? I wondered if Aunt Ruchel's baby was there. A nurse came into the room and waved to Uncle Abrasha. She came closer to the window and in her arms was the tiniest, reddest little baby I had ever seen. Uncle Abrasha's eyes filled with tears as he pointed to himself. The nurse nodded her head.

"Is that Aunt Ruchel's baby?" I asked, not believing that this shriveled-up infant could belong to my aunt. No one else seemed to notice the red and wrinkled skin. They were talking about how beautiful the baby was and what nice curly hair she had.

"Mama," I interrupted, "did I look like that?"

They began to laugh. "All new babies look like that, Imic," Mama said. "Even you." She pinched me lightly on the cheek.

"Can we see Aunt Ruchel now?" I asked.

"Soon, Imic," Aunt Golda said. "She must rest first."

We continued looking at the baby. I was fascinated by the way she kept trying to put her little fist into her mouth.

"She's hungry," I said, pointing.

The nurse must have heard me, because she picked up the baby and put a bottle filled with clear liquid to her mouth. The baby began to suck immediately.

"Look at her," I said. "Look at how smart she is. She already knows how to eat."

Everyone smiled at me as if I had said something funny.

"Come," my mother said to us. "Let's go and see Ruchel."

A nurse was standing inside Aunt Ruchel's room. "Only two at a time," she cautioned.

"You go first, Abrasha," my mama said.

"You come with me, Imic," Uncle Abrasha said.

We went inside. The room was rather large and not very light. There were eight beds, but six of them were empty. In the last one I saw my Aunt Ruchel.

We walked over to her and stood quietly beside the bed. She seemed to be asleep. Uncle Abrasha leaned down and kissed her on the cheek. She opened her eyes slowly and smiled.

"It's a girk, Abrasha," she said weakly.

"A beautiful gir," he answered, and took her hand.

"How do you like her, Imic?" Aunt Ruchel asked.

"I think she is the smartest baby in all of Bucharest. What will you name her, Aunt Ruchel?"

"I like the name Mariam," she answered, and closed her eyes. She seemed so tired.

The nurse came over and motioned for us to leave. Uncle Abrasha kissed her again and we went out into the hall.

Mariam, I thought. That was a wonderful name. I felt very pleased. I couldn't wait to write a letter to my friend and tell her. She would be so surprised.

All the way home I thought about the baby and wondered if she would ever not be red and wrinkled.

MR. NIJINSKY

"Imic, wake up," Mama gently shook me. "It's time to get ready for school."

I opened my eyes and jumped out of bed. "Get dressed quickly," Mama commanded, and left the room.

I dressed and went to the table. Mama had a bowl of hot cereal ready for me. I ate fast and started for the door.

"You coat, put your coat on, Imic, it's cold outside," she said.

The weather had begun to lose that summer feeling about a week before. The sun went down much sooner and the nights seemed longer.

Mama had taken me to see the school the week before. It was a long way from my house, but we had ridden the bus so I would know the way.

I ran to the corner now, putting my coat on as I ran, and climbed on the bus. It was full of people on their way to work. There was nowhere to sit so I stood and leaned against a seat, looking at the people around me. They all looked so sad. No one was smiling or laughing. They talked in low whispers. People used to laugh a lot in Bucharest, but all that had changed.

No one in our family talked much about the problems in Bucharest, but we knew things were getting worse. Each day more companies were becoming state owned. The food in the sotres was getting scarce. Our taxis could run only three days a week because of gas rationing. One of the movie houses had reopened, but the films were all about the People's Republic and what was called "The Good Life." From what I could understand, that meant that there were no rich people. Everyone was equal and everyone supposedly owned a part of everything. If that was true, then I couldn't understand why we couldn't get food, clothes or gasoline without a ration ticket. It seemed to me that the government officials were the ones getting the equal share. They rode in big cars and I'm sure they ate very well. I couldn't complain too much because we still had food, but we knew people who didn't have enough to eat.

Sometime later, I got off the bus and walked the few short blocks to the school.

The school was a big building made of concrete with a fence around it. Inside the fence was a big yard where many children were standing and talking.

I felt very much the same way I had when I left to go to camp, afraid and lonely. Would I ever feel good about meeting new people?

I went into the yard and wondered what I should do. There were so many unfamiliar faces. No one seemed to notice me--everyone was talking and laughing. Suddenly I heard a voice shouting. "Imic, Imic--over here--" I had heard the voice before.

"Imic--here--it's me, Vadim, do you remember me?"

"Vadim," I said surprised, "What are you doing here?"

"I go to school here. I'm in the eighth form. What about you? What form are you in?" he asked.

"I'm not sure," I stammered, "no one told me."

"Listen, Imic, if anyone bothers you here, you just let me know and I'll take care of them," he whispered.

"Thanks, Vadim," I said seriously. I was glad to know one person here, even if it was Vadim. He probably wasn't really such a bad person.

"Time to go in," he said, and pushed me toward the door. "I'll see you later." He vanished into the crowd of children moving into the school.

This school was very different from the one in Brichen. It was much bigger and had many rooms. My other school was just one big room that everyone sat in.

A man was standing on a platform in the middle of the hall holding paper in his hand. He talked into a horn that made his voice very loud.

"Attention, all new students," he began. I stood still and waited for him to continue. "Please listen for your name and then come with me." Finally my name was called and I joined a group of other newcomers standing around him.

"You will follow me," he said, stepping down from the platform. I looked around at the other children. I was surprised at how many new students there were. There must have been around thirty. Out in the yard, I had been sure that I was the only one.

We all went into a large room where he told each of us to take a seat at one of the wooden desks. He then handed out booklets and pencils.

"This is a placement examination," he announced. "You will answer each question and when you are through we will decide which form to put you in. Ready--begin."

I opened the booklet and read the questions. The first ones were about mathematics and they were easy. Then there were questions about people I knew nothing about. Lenin, Stalin and Marx. When were they born? There were many other things about their lives. We were just beginning to learn about them in Brichen when I left. I decided to leave those questions blank. Then came a section of Rumanian history and a history of Communism. I had learned Russian history and I didn't understand Communism, so I didn't answer those either. I looked at the other children. They seemed as confused as I was.

Finally, after what seemed a very long time, the man said, "Close the booklets, put down your pencils and sit quietly."

He collected each booklet and opened one after the other. Finally he put them down, shook his head and said, "It appears that no one here knows very much about the important things that you are to learn in school. You will all be in the same form and I will be your teacher. My name is Nijinsky. Mr. Nijinsky." I looked at the other children. Many of them seemed much older--at least as old as Vadim. There were only three or four others who seemed to be my age.

"Let us begin," Mr. Nijinsky said. "I will start with Stalin."

Mr. Nijinsky was a rather funny looking little man. He was very short and his suit looked much too large. He had only a little hair and wore round glasses. His neck was long and skinny and his fingernails were dirty.

I didn't hear much about what he said about Stalin except that he was always to be honored for his great wisdom. His voice went on and on and I was getting very sleepy. I could tell already that I wasn't going to like this school.

At long last, a bell sounded and he announced that we were to follow him into the lunchroom.

After lunch, we returned to our desks and he began again. This time we heard about the greatness of Communism and equality of the people. I was very sleepy and bored and just wanted school to be over.

Finally a bell sounded and we were dismissed. We filed out of the room and I ran towards the door. Vadim suddenly was beside me.

"Who is your teacher?" he asked.

"Mr. Nijinsky," I said and made a face.

"Oh, he's awful," Vadim laughed. "We call him the 'Old Bird'."

I laughed. He did look a little like a bird.

I left the schoolyard and walked to the bus. I wished I didn't have to go back to school ever again.

THE MISTAKE

The days all melted together now. I missed my job at the factory very much and I hated school. Each time I looked at Mr. Nijinsky, he looked more like a bird. Sometimes I could hardly keep from laughing out loud when he would stretch his long neck to see what someone in the back of the room was doing. Every day we learned more about history and Stalin and Lenin.

Baby Mariam was getting bigger fast. On the days when there was no school, I would go to Aunt Ruchel's apartment to see her. When the weather was nice, we would take Mariam to the park in her carriage. People would look at her pink little face and say how pretty she was. Aunt Ruchel let me hold and feed her a lot.

Aunt Golda and Willy were preparing for their wedding. Papa told me that the next week I would get a new suit for the wedding.

Papa seemed to be worried these days. He was afraid that the soap factory would have to clse soon because the police had already started asking questions. He sand that Uncle Abrasha had had to become involved in the black market because it was not safe to drive the taxis. I still didn't understand exactly what that meant, but I knew it was not good.

One evening when Papa returned from work, Aunt Golda and Willy were waiting at our house.

We had just about used up all of our food by this time, so we didn't have much for dinner that night. Mama said we couldn't get our stamps for two more days so we would have to eat sparingly. I couldn't understand how Papa could be making so much money and yet we didn't have any food. When I asked him why, he told me that the market owners could only accept tickets, not money.

"Velvel," Aunt Golda said, "how can I have a wedding when there will be no food for our guests?" She seemed very upset.

"Don't worry, Golda," Papa said. "I'm going to buy food from the farmers for your wedding. Your wedding will by the finest--just wait and see."

"Velvel," my mama said fearfully, "that's much too dangerous. What if you are caught? You know it's against the law to buy food from anyone except the state-owned stores."

"Chava," my father said calmly, "Golda and Willy are going to have a nice wedding. Don't worry. I won't be caught."

Mama didn't look very sure of that to me, but she didn't say anything else.

"When are you going, Velvel?" she asked.

"I'll go with the driver very early tomorrow morning. I'll be back before lunchtime. Then Imic and I will see about his new suit," he replied.

Aunt Golda hugged him and said, "I knew you would know what to do, Velvel. Thank you for helping us."

When I awoke the next morning, Papa had already left for the country and Mama was sitting quietly at the table. Her eyes were red and I knew she had been crying. I didn't say much; I just ate my breakfast and went to school.

All during the day I tried to listen to Mr. Nijinsky, but I kept thinking of Papa and how Mama looked sitting at the table all alone and sad this morning. Even Vadim stopped me in the hall to ask me what was wrong. I just shrugged my shoulders and walked away.

Finally the bell sounded and I rushed home. I ran into the house shouting Papa's name. Mama was still sitting at the table. Papa was not there.

"Where is Papa?" I asked in a whisper. "Did he go to the factory?"

"No, Imic," my mama said slowly. "Your Papa has not come back from the country."

I went to her and put my arms around her. There was nothing I could say to her. I was just as frightened as she was.

I sat down beside her at the table and didn't say a word. We continued to sit, not talking, until the room began to grow dark. I could feel fear growing in me and Mama was crying softly.

"Mama," I said breaking the long silence, "what could have happened to Papa?"

"I don't know, Imic," she replied. "I just don't know at all."

That didn't sound like Mama. I thought back to the times when she and I had gone looking for him--the fearless way she faced danger, the time when she had thrown a basket of food at the NKGB and never looked back. I looked at her. She seemed tired and sad and helpless.

"Let's go and look for him, Mama," I said encouragingly. "We can find him, I know we can. Remember how we found him in the hospital. We can do it again."

"No, Imic," she said in a strange voice. "I can't do it again. I have no strength left. I will wait here for him."

It frightened me to hear Mama talk like that. I didn't like to think she was not strong. To me, there was nothing that she couldn't do. I put my arms around her neck and said, "I'll wait here with you, Mama. He will be back, I know he will."

We sat again in silence, listening to the sounds of the night, waiting, hoping...

"Imic, Imic, wake up," a voice said.

"Papa, is that you?"

"Yes, my son."

I threw my arms around him and hugged him tightly. "Where's Mama?" I asked, not seeing her. I had fallen asleep at the table.

"Your mother is paking our clothes," he replied.

"Packing," I said, in great surprise. "Where are we going? Why are we leaving?"

"I don't have time to explain now, Imic," he said. "Go and put on your darkest clothes. Make sure they are warm and please hurry."

I moved toward my room in a trance. I couldn't believe we were running away again. I did as I was told and dressed in black pants and a black sweater. I sensed that I would not be coming back to this room, so I quickly picked up a few things to take with me. I took the writing folder and fountain pen that Aunt Golda had given me and my red scarf from camp.

"Chava, do you have the picture?" my father said as I returned to the front room.

"Yes, Velvel, and I have the gold and jewelry and a few clothes and some food," she said quietly.

"Where are we going?" I demanded to know. "Why must we wear dark clothes? What about Aunt Golda and Aunt Ruchel, are they going with us? Please tell me."

"Imic, I will explain part of it to you. But when Zanvel comes we must go," he said.

Zanvel, who is Zanvel? The only Zanvel I ever knew was a man in Brichen, and my papa used to say he took money from people for doing dishonest things. Could this be the same man?

"We must leave Bucharest, Imic, or else we will be arrested," Papa said with urgency.

"But why?" I asked.

"This morning after I had bought the food from the farmers, I was stopped by the police. They saw all the food in the car and assumed I was bringing it to Bucharest to sell in the black market. I explained that the food was for my sister's wedding and not to sell, but of course they didn't believe me. The driver and I were arrested. One policeman got into my car and the other took my driver with him. On the way to the station in Bucharest, we came across a terrible accident. Several people were hurt, and the automobile was in flames. The policeman drove my car up to the crowd and ran towards the accident. He forgot about me. I opened the door and ran away. I've been hiding in the woods all day, waiting for darkness. Finally I went to Abrasha's house and he agreed to arrange our escape. The police will be looking for me all over Bucharest. So you see, my son, we must leave again."

"Where are we going, Papa?"

Before he could answer, there were three sharp knocks on the door.

"That is Zanvel, Chava. We must go now." Papa took the bag Mama was holding. Her face was white and had no expression. The door opened and the man called Zanvel stood there. It was the same man I had seen in Brichen. His face looked blank. He was dressed in a black coat and hat. He motioned for us to come outside.

On the street a black automobile stood, the motor still running. We got into the car and drove away. I looked out through the back window at our little house standing there, the lights still on, just like a family lived there, and I was very sad.

Goodbye Bucharest, goodbye Aunt Golda, Willy, Aunt Ruchel, Uncle Abrasha and goodby Baby Mariam. Someday I will find you all again. Someday in Palestine we will meet again. Tears slid down my face. I moved closer to Mama and put my head on her shoulder. She put her arm around me and said quietly, "I'm sorry, Imic."

We drove quickly through the back streets of Bucharest and out into the countryside. The landscape looked eerie in the dark night. Everything was very still. The only moving thing was our automobile.

I was filled with curiosity, but didn't ask any questions. I just sat close to Mama and waiting to find my own answers.

ANOTHER BORDER TO CROSS

We stopped in the middle of a big field where there was a small house. I clung to my mama's hand as Zanvel opened the door and motioned for us to come in. It was a strange place. There was just a few pieces of furniture and the floors were bare. Another man was waiting inside. He was also dressed in black and had no expression on his face.

"Where are we, Papa?" I asked hesitantly.

"We are near the border, Imic," he answered.

The border--another border. When would we ever get through with crossing borders? I wondered which one we were near this time.

Zanvel was speaking to the man in black. "Take them in the wagon to Satu Mare and from there to the border. Someone will meet your wagon. You will return here and wait for further instructions." The man nodded as if he had heard this many times before.

We followed Zanvel and the man in black outside and around to the back of the farmhouse. There in the yard was a hay wagon and two horses.

Zanvel shook Papa's hand and told us to lie down in the wagon. He covered us with a blanket and piled hay all over us. It was scratchy and very uncomfortable, but I didn't say a word. I was lying between Mama and Papa and I could touch them both.

"What is Satu Mare, Papa?" I asked in a whisper.

"It is a small town near the border, Imic. Now try and sleep because we have a long night ahead of us."

"Are we escaping, Papa?" I asked, wanting desperately to know.

"Yes, Imic, once again we are escaping. I hope for the last time," Papa said sadly. "No more talk now."

The wagon was moving slowly and I could hear the boards creaking as the wheels moved along the bumpy road. I had all kinds of strange thoughts as I listened to the night sounds and the horses' hooves clopping over the stones. What if this whole thing was a trick and Zanvel was not trying to help us, but turning us over to the police? No, I thought, that couldn't be. Hadn't Papa said that Uncle Abrasha had arranged it? Papa would know if anything wasn't right.

I couldn't understand what Papa had done that was so wrong. Why were the police after us? Just because he had bought food for Golda's wedding? Poor Aunt Golda. We didn't even get to say good-bye. I knew there wasn't any point in thinking about Aunt Golda or Aunt Ruchel or even Baby Mariam, because from what Papa said we wouldn't have been able to stay in Bucharest. The police would have found him eventually and he would have been arrested. I wondered why Papa asked Mama if she had the picture. What picture and why? There were so many questions.

On and on we went in the wagon, over rocks and up and down hills. I remembered the other wagon we had been in, Mama and I. It seemed like a long time ago. I remembered how frightened I had been. This time I felt safer--maybe because Papa was there too.

Suddenly the wagon was slowing. I heard horses coming towards us. I reached for Papa's hand. It was cold. I listened carefully and could hear someone shouting at our driver.

He must have been ordered to stop because the wagon jerked and was still. I felt like I couldn't breathe and my chest hurt. My stomach was going round and round and I thought I was going to be sick. Had we been discovered? Was this the end for us?

The voices were clearer now. It sounded like two men. "Where are you going?" one asked sharply.

"I'm delivering this hay and wagon to a farmer in Satu Mare," the driver answered.

"Get down from the wagon," the second man commanded.

This was it, I thought. I was holding Papa's hand so tightly my fingers hurt. We would be discovered now and Papa would be arrested. My mouth was so dry and I couldn't swallow. There was something in my throat and I couldn't breathe.

The men were shining lights into the wagon. I could see the flare from my hiding place. I lay very still, not daring to move. The lights went away and the men were whispering to the driver. I couldn't hear what they were saying, but I heard something that sounded like coins clinking together. The men roon off and the wagon started to move again. We were safe! I began to feel a little better. My breath came back and I could swallow. My legs and arms hurs from being so still.

I let go of Papa's hand and again listened to the creaking of the wagon as it slowly moved along.

We hadn't been moving very long when the wagon again began slowing down. Something was different. The wagon wasn't jerking along anymore. It was going smoothly. The wheels were rolling on a street, not just a path. This must be Satu Mare. I continued to lie still and listen. Soon we were once again on dirt and rocks—the wagon must have passed through the town.

The wagon stopped again. This time I could feel that there were other people around.

The driver spoke. "Zanvel sent me."

I peeked out of the hay and saw a big wooden tower with a light attached. The light was shining across the empty fields. There was a fence that cut the fields in half, a high fence, taller than any man. There were many men in uniforms with guns. This was the border. We had reached the border. The man to whom the driver had spoken said, "Go ahead," and we started again. I couldn't believe it. Zanvel had arranged everything. I wondered how he had done all this in such a short amount of time.

As soon as we had driven a few yards, the wagon stopped and I felt someone uncovering me. Mama, Papa and I sat up and brushed off the hay. Papa put his arms around me and Mama and said, "We are safe. This is Hungary."

Mama was crying, but she didn't seem to be sad. She was smiling and big tears were rolling down her face.

The driver said, "We will wait here until Alex arrives. He will take you to the next stop."

We didn't have to wait long before the man called Alex arrived. He didn't look very different from Zanvel or the wagon driver. He too wore black clothes. As we got down from the wagon he asked my father, "Did you bring it?"

"Yes," my father said.

Bring what? Was there some secret thing going on that I didn't know about?

"Take this rope and tie it around your waist," the man called Alex instructed us. "This is a rough trip and we must not get separated from each other."

"Aren't we safe now?" my mama asked. "We have crossed the border." She sounded angry.

"There are police on both sides," he said patiently, "who will do anything for a price. You will not be safe until we are much closer to Budapest. Do as I say. We must travel by night, and we don't have many hours of darkness left."

Papa tied us all together, and then handed the rope to Alex. Papa was at the end, I was in the middle, Mama and then Alex.

We began to walk. It was very hard to keep in step. If I waslked too fast or too slow, the rope would pull and I would fall down. Finally I learned to take the same steps that Mama took. We hadn't walked far when it began to rain. I was very wet and getting cold. I didn't complain and just kept walking. Alex turned off the road and headed for the fields. The rain was still coming down and I could barely see Mama in front of me. My clothes felt heavy on my body and my legs were tired. I imagined hearing all sorts of things, but I guess it was only the rain. We were walking in a cornfield. The stalks were short and very sharp and they cut through my shoes. Suddenly I was seized with terror. I remembered the circus wagon colleting children. I could see the man's face leaning out of the wagon and begging Papa to let me ride. I could see myself begging to go and Papa refusing. It was all so clear in my mind, but I couldn't understand what made me remember it then. We walked on, trying to avoid the stalks. I kept falling down into the mud. Suddenly I realized what made me remember the circus wagon. It was the cornfield. We had walked through a cornfield that same night and the stalks I stepped on were really the bodies of the children. I started to scream. I just stood still in the middle of the rain-soaked cornfield and screamed. Everyone stopped.

"Imic, what is it?" my father shouted, obviously alarmed.

"Are you hurt?" my mama asked.

"The circus wagon," I shouted, "it's coming back--it's coming back. The children are all dead."

Papa untied my rope and lifted me into his arms.

"No, Imic, no, my son. That was long ago. The circus wagon has gone and will never come back."

My body was shaking from the vision and from the cold, and I was still sobbing. I buried my face into Papa's coat and tried to stop shaking.

"We must continue," Alex said harshly. "We don't have time to stop."

Papa continued to carry me. My feet hurt so badly and I could feel the cuts from the stalks. We were moving very slowly through rows and rows of corn stalks. Would we never get out of this place, I wondered, still trembling. Why were we always running?

At last we came out of the corn field and Alex said that we could rest. The rain had almost stopped. Papa put me on the ground, and he and Mama sat down beside me. I could barely see them, it was so dark. Mama put her arms around me and pulled me close. I put my head in her lap and closed my eyes. After a few minutes, Alex told us to get up. In the distance, we could see the sun beginning to rise.

"Hurry," he said. "We must go."

We walked faster now. I could see a little of the countryside now. It looked just like Rumania. I looked at Mama and Papa. They were both very wet and their feet were covered with mud.

We saw no one in the fields as we walked. We seemed to be the only people awake.

We stopped again, and Alex said that just over the hill was a town where we could board a train that would take us to Budapest. He would go with us, he said, and in Budapest we would be safe and able to get help. He unfastened our ropes and put them into a pouch he carried.

We climbed the hill looking down at the town. I thought I would see Brichen on the other side. I thought I would see the same bombed-out village I had seen before. We reached the top and I closed my eyes tightly. I didn't want to see another destroyed town.

"Down that long street is the station," Alex said.

I opened my eyes slowly. All I saw was a small sleeping town. No buildings had been destroyed. What a relief that was for me. We hurried down the hill and into the town.

We stopped in the street and Alex said something to a man standing on the corner. The man returned with a brown sack. Alex handed each of us a hard roll and a piece of cheese. I had forgotten that I was so hungry.

When we came to the train station, Alex went to buy tickets for us.

"But we don't have papers," I whispered to Papa.

"You don't need papers here, Imic," Alex said, hearing my comment to Papa. "Hungary is still a free country. The Communists haven't taken over yet."

"Will Mr. Petru Groza come here too?" I asked.

"Well, maybe not Petru Groza, but surely before too long someone like him will take over," Alex answered.

"I hope we'll be gone by then," I said aloud and to myself I thought "Palestine."

There were not very many people on the train. It must have been too early. The other people stared at us. I looked at Mama, Papa and myself, and I could understand why they looked at us. We were dirty, our clothes were still wet, our feet covered with mud, and our shoes were ripped from the corn stalks. Only Alex looked as if he had just gotten dressed. His black coat was not soiled, nor were his black pants--only his boots looked a little muddy.

The train rumbled along through the mountains and I pressed my face against the glass window so I would miss nothing.

Before I knew it, the train conductor was saying "Budapest."

"Are we there, Mama?" I asked.

"Almost, Imic," she said. She sounded so tired.

"Where will we go when we arrive, Papa?" I asked curiously.

"We will go to a place set up by the Joint Distribution Agency, Imic," he answered.

"What is that?"

"It's a group of Jewish people who help other Jews get located in different countries. They also help Jews with no homes to go to Palestine."

"Palestine," I said with great excitement. "Will we go to Palestine?"

"I hope so, Imic, but you must be patient. It takes a long time and thre are so many people ahead of us," he explained carefully.

I was filled with joy and hope. Palestine! It seemed too good to be true.

The train stopped. I looked out the window and realized that Budapest was a big city. I could see a river that looked as though it went right through the middle. "Look at the river," I exclaimed.

"That's the Danube River, Imic," Alex said. "On one side is Buda, on the other side, the city of Pest. Together they are known as Budapest."

It looked a lot like Bucharest before Mr. Petru Groza came. There were wide streets and lots of automobiles. I liked big cities and I thought I might like Budapest. But only for a little while--I was going to Palestine.

Alex found us a taxi. When he said the address, the driver looked at us sadly. We drove through the streets already filled with other automobiles and people.

Finally, we stopped in front of an old-looking building. "This is it," Alex announced.

It was a strange-looking place. There were no other buildings around it. It looked like it might fall down any minute.

"May I have it now?" Alex asked my father.

"When we are inside," my father replied firmly.

Once again this mysterious talk about "it." I wanted badly to know what "it" was.

Alex knocked at the door. A pretty woman answered, nodded towards Alex and looked at us. "Oh, my poor friends," she said in Yiddish. "Come in."

Papa turned and took something out of his pocket. It was a picture--or rather half a picture--of me. I remembered that picture. It was taken after I got my first haircut in Brichen. He handed the half-picture to Alex. We all shook his hand and said goodbye. Alex smiled and disappeared into the waiting taxi.

So the "it" was the picture.

"Why did you give him my picture?" I asked Papa.

"Your uncle Abrasha has the other half. Our arrangement was that when we were safe I would give the other half to the person who brought us here. Alex will pass it on to Zanvel, who will give it to Abrasha. When Abrasha has the whole picture, he will then pay Zanvel for getting us here."

"That was a very smart thing to do, Papa," I said with admiration.

Papa smiled at me and put his arm around my shoulder. "Come, Imic, let's go inside."

The woman who opened the door was smiling too. She held the door open for us and we went inside. She took us to an office where we sat in hard wooden chairs. She sat behind a desk and began to ask us questions. Papa answered them all, but I was getting worried. Why did she want all this information? I had learned not to trust people who asked questions. The woman wanted to know who was in our family, where we were during the war, and many other things. Why did Papa give her all the correct answers? I remembered all the questions we were asked before when we were sent to the labor camp. They were almost the same. I looked over at Mama. She did not look frightened, only tired.

Everything was written down on a pad. Then the woman called a lady typing in another office, gave her the pad and told us to follow her.

I hung back, not knowing where she was taking us. Mama took my hand and pulled me along.

"No, Mama, I don't want to go."

"Oh, Imic, come along," she said, annoyed.

We followed the woman down a long hall. She opened a door and I saw a large fenced-in area. There were small shedlike buildings there and many people standing around. Clothes hung on ropes tied to the sheds.

"No, no," I began to scream. "Not again, I will not go in there. You can't make me--it's a labor camp--no, no--" I continued to scraam. I broke away from Mama and began to run back to the door. Papa ran after me and caught me. He picked me up. I was screaming and kicking. "No, no, I won't go--I won't." I began crying hysterically.

I kept squirming and kicking, and finally Papa put me down.

"Imic, Imic, don't be frightened," he said gently.

But I wouldn't listen. I began to pound the floor with my fists and feet.

The next thing I remember was a slap across my face. I was still. It shocked me. Papa had hit me. I looked up at him and my eyes filled with tears.

"I'm sorry, Imic," he said, holding me closely. "He's just upset," he explained to the woman. "He has seen much for a little child."

The woman kept smiling and said to me, "I understand how frightened you are. You won't have to be here long."

Still sobbing softly, I followed Papa and Mama through the gate.

THE JOINT DISTRIBUTION AGENCY IN BUDAPEST

The families in the Displaced Persons camp came from all over Europe. There were many people like ourselves who had escaped from Rumania when the Communists took over. Others came from Poland, Bulgaria, Russia and Lithuania.

Life was not like it had been at the labor camp. The people here did not have to work. They were all just waiting. All day, they sat around playing chess or talking. Everyone spoke Yiddish. Three times a day we went to the big kitchen in the yard and were given food. The place had a strangeness about it. There was little or no laughter and the other people, Jews like us, just waited and seemed to be afraid.

The first night I was very frightened. Cots had been set up and at least we had clean warm blankets. But I couldn't sleep because there were so many people crowded into the same room. I lay awake most of the night listening to the sound of whispers and crying around me.

There were a few children, but not many. They didn't seem very friendly and I didn't feel much like making friends either. Sometimes Mama, Papa and I would go through the gates and go for a walk on the wide streets, but we were always sure to return before dark.

The people in charge of the DP camp, as it was called, were very nice. They talked to me and made me laugh. I liked the pretty lady who had greeted us very much. Some days I would go to her office and she would give me a piece of chocolate. She told me that once she had had a little boy who looked a lot like me. I always wanted to ask her what happened to him, but I was afraid, so I never did.

Each night at 9:00 a big green truck would drive up to the yard. A man called out a list of names and those people would collect their belongings and get on the truck. The truck would leave and come back empty the next night.

I was afraid. I couldn't believe these people were being taken to a safe place. I found my papa. "Where are they going, Papa?"

"They are being taken to Vienna, Imic, in Austria. They will go to a place to wait, and from there they will go to Palestine."

"Will we go too?" I asked, instantly unafraid at the word "Palestine."

"Yes, my son. We will go too, as soon as our names are called."

"Vienna," I said. "Where is that? Is it far away? Will we have to cross another border?"

"Imic," Papa laughed, "you never forget to ask questions, do you?"

"I like to know things, Papa."

"That's good--never get too old to learn," he said, patting my head.

"Then tell me about Vienna," I begged.

"I've never seen Vienna," he replied, "but I have read about it. It's a big and very beautiful city. There is an opera house that covers a whole street, and a beautiful palace where an emperor lived at one time. There are many parks. Since the war, the city is divided into four zones. The American zone, French, English and Russian zones. I don't know what it will be like when we get there. And yes, we have to cross the Hungarian border again, but this time I don't think there will be any trouble at all."

"How long will it take us to get there, Papa?"I asked.

"I don't know, Imic. Maybe a day, maybe two," he replied.

"Will we be there long?" I asked.

"We will stay there until it is our turn, son," he said. "Now that's enough questions."

I had many questions left to ask, but decided to wait until another time. I wondered if there were movie houses in Vienna. I hoped so.

I learned a lot by listening to the grownups talk late at night when they thought the children were all asleep.

"Hungary will fall soon," I heard someone say one night, "just as Rumania did. The Communists will take over and there will be nowhere left for the jews to go."

"Palestine is where the Jews will go," another man said. "I believe that Palestine will become a state and a homeland for the Jews very soon."

"I know people who have gone to Palestine, who ran the blockade, only to find fighting going on between the Arabs and the Jews. There seems to be nowhere that is safe," a third person said sadly.

I had never heard of such a thing. Jews fighting. That seemed incredible. Yakov had taught us that the Jews in Palestine were farmers. I didn't like hearing that things in Palestine weren't the way I thought they were. That man must be wrong. Palestine was the land of milk and honey. Yakov said so!

The conversation continued late into the night. The man talked on and on about the British controlling Palestine and something about a white paper and fighting between the British and the Jews. I wanted to listen but I was just too sleepy. I would ask my father about all this talk of fighting in Palestine. He would know if that were true or not. Tomorrow I would ask...

ON TO VIENNA

Each morning began the same way. We went to the yard and were given bread and cheese. The women busied themselves trying to clean the little sheds, which all had dirt floors. The men sat around reading or playing chess. I spent most of my days watching the men. I longed to play but the other children didn't want to at all. I found some paper and a drawing pencil that someone had left behind and I would sit behind the sheds and draw pictures of the trees and the mountains in the distance.

Each night more people left and each day more arrived. The new arrivals all looked frightened. Most of them were very dirty as if they had traveled great distances. We must have looked just like that when we first came.

One night I found my mama putting things into a suitcase. Her face was filled with excitement.

"Mama, what are you doing?"

"Oh, Imic," she hugged me. "I think we'll be going on the truck tonight."

"How do you know, Mama? Did someone tell you?"

"This morning I looked around," she explained, "and almost everyone who was here when we came has gone. I think it's our turn."

"Does Papa know?"

"Not yet, I didn't want to tell him in front of the other men," she said.

Papa suddenly appeared as if he had heard our conversation.

"What are you doing, Chava?" he asked when he saw the suitcase. "Where are you going?"

"We are going," she announced triumphantly. "I am sure that tonight we will be called," she said. She repeated to Papa what she had told me.

We had our dinner in silence. I was so excited about the possibility of leaving that I could hardly eat anything. Mama said in a low whisper, "Eat your food, Imic."

"I can't, Mama," I replied. "I'm too excited."

"I know," she said, "but it may be a long time before we eat again."

I remembered all the times I had been hungry and forced myself to put food in my mouth.

After dinner, Papa whispered to Mama, "Give me the gold and jewels, Chava." She produced a little brown pouch from her shirt, which he then put inside his own.

At 9:00 we went outside to the kitchen area where the announcements were always made. The truck arrived quickly. My throat went dry as the man began to read from the list he held in his hand.

"The third name he read was "Velvel Raboi." Then "Chava Raboi." At last--"Imic Raboi."

We were going! Mama was right. Since we were already packed we went directly to the truck and climbed in through the open flaps at the back. There were two long benches, one on each side. It was completely covered by a tarpaulin so that we could not see out of the sides.

As more people got in, their voices seemed to have changed. There was lots of laughing and everyone seemed happy.

When there were about 30 of us, the man in charge climbed in and raised his hand. There was instant silence. We all watched him and waited for his words.

"For the most of the night until tomorrow morning you will be traveling in this truck. Sometime in the early morning you will cross the Hungarian border into Austria. While Hungary is still free, the borders are patroled. Everything has been arranged for your safe crossing, but please do not try to get out of this truck or speak to anyone at the border. You will be taken directly to the Rothschild Hospital in Vienna, where you will be fed and each of you will have a medical examination. From there you will be taken to another place where you will await passage to Palestine." He turned to leave and said, "Good luck."

I couldn't believe it. It was really happening. We were going to Palestine. Just one more stop and we would go. I hugged Mama and smiled. She smiled back with tears in her eyes.

The trip took a long time. In the beginning everybody talked about our good fortune, but then people began to get sleepy. One by one they moved to the floor to lie down. I lay on the bench and closed my eyes. I awoke as the truck stopped. For an instant, I didn't know where I was. I could hardly see in the darkness. I sat up quickly and looked around. I could see Mama beside me and then I remembered. We must be at the border. Other people were talking softly. "The Austrian border," one man announced matter-of-factly.

I listened with my ear to the tarp and could make out faint voices in the distance. We didn't stop for long. When we had been moving for a few minutes, the truck stopped again.

Fear shot through me. "Why are we stopped, Papa?" I asked, terrified.

At that moment, the back flaps were opened and tied back. The driver was looking in at us. I was surprised to see daylight again. We had been traveling all night.

"We will be in Vienna soon." [illegible] We all cheered. He smiled and returned to the cab of the truck.

Before too long, we began to slow down again. I could see behind us and I began to see houses along the road. We were arriving in Vienna.

I crawled to the very back of the truck and an old man moved so that I could see out better.

"Here son, sit here," he said. I have seen Vienna before. Get a good look, she's a beautiful city."

He was right. Everything looked like it was carved out of gray stone. There were statues and beautiful trees and big places that were filled with flowers.

Soon we stopped in front of an enormous building. The sign carved into stone said "Rothschild Hospital."

We had made it!

THE DP CAMP IN VIENNA

We were met at the door by a nurse who took us into a big room filled with chairs. We were all very tired and we sank down into the comfortable seats.

She talked to us in Yiddish. "Welcome to the Rothschild Hospital and to Vienna. My name is Miss Lascar and I am in charge of helping refugees get located. First, everyone will take a shower, then you'll have a medical examination. There is nothing to be afraid of here--we will check your lungs, heart and blood pressure and make sure you are not ill. After that we will go into the dining room for breakfast."

She stopped speaking and looked at us. "Please don't be frightened," she said. "We are here to help you, not hurt you. I was once sitting in the same chairs that you are sitting in because I was a displaced person too. If I can answer any questions, please let me know."

She waited and the fearful faces seemed to change.

"I have a question," an old man said. "When can I go to Palestine?"

"I'm sorry," she replied, "I don't know the answer to that. I'm waiting to to too. Maybe we'll go together."

She led us into another big room. "Men, go to the left and take showers and shampoo your hair. Women, to the right you will find your showers. Doctors will see you when you are through."

I took Papa's hand and we went into a giant room with a concrete floor and showers all around. Papa put shampoo on my head and began to rub it in. I hadn't realized how dirty I really was. The water was very hot and felt good beating down on me. The room became very foggy from the steam and I could barely see the other men.

Papa and I stepped out of the shower room and a young man in a white coat handed us fresh-smelling towels. We all dried ourselves, wrapped the towels around our waists, and followed the young man into still another room where we sat down to wait.

I felt a little foolish sitting in a room filled with so many men without their clothes on. I had seen Papa and my grandfather and uncles, but that was my family. Here were old, young, short, tall, fat and skinny men, all together sitting naked except for a little towel. The old man who had asked about Palestine was funny-looking naked. His very white chest had about six gray hairs on it. It was sunken in like a cave. I had never seen a chest like that before. I continued to stare until the man in the white coat spoke. "Before you go in for your medical examination, we will put something on you to kill the lice. They grow especially well in hair."

I giggled to myself imagining a louse hiding in the old man's six gray hairs.

"Lice," he went on, "can't be seen easily and soap doesn't kill them. We have something that will." He opened up a huge sack and began scooping up handfuls of white powder. It looked exactly like flour.

"Do we have to put flour on us, Papa?" I asked.

Papa looked puzzled, "I don't understand what it is, Imic."

We were told to take handfuls of the flour and put it all over our bodies. Soon everyone in the room was white. The stuff was everywhere. I thought that this is what ghosts must look like if there was such a thing.

"Why are we putting flour on ouselves?" I asked the man.

He laughed out loud and explained that this was a chemical called DDT that killed lice.

Then we had to shower again to rinse the stuff off. None of it made very much sense to me. This time they gave us white robes to put on.

The medical examination came next. That part wasn't so bad because all the doctor did was put a funny little circle-shaped thing on my chest and back. It felt cold on. He told me to take deep breaths. Then he felt my chest and my stomach with his hand. That tickled and made me laugh. He wrapped something gray around my arm and began to pump on a long tube. That part did scare me a little until he explained that he was taking my blood pressure. He didn't do much else except look at my throat, my eyes and into my ears, then he hit me on the knee a few times with a little hammer. My foot jumped when he did that and kicked him in the stomach.

"Oh, I'm sorry," I stammered. "I didn't mean to kick you. My foot just wouldn't stay still." I could feel my face turning red.

"Don't apologize," he laughed, "your foot was supposed to do that."

That seemed strange, but I just smiled and didn't say anything.

I never knew that part of my body could do something against my will.

At last it was time to eat. The food was delicious. There were rolls, cheese, butter, eggs, melons and sweet pastries. There was a big pitcher of milk on each table as well as hot tea and coffee. None of us talked at all, we just ate.

The nurse who had greeted us came into the dining room as we were finishing. "Well, you all look cleaner and not quite so tired and hungry. In a few minutes, your clothes will be returned. They have all been alundered. When you're dressed, we will discuss the arrangements for your stay here in Vienna."

The clothes felt wonderful. It had been a long time since I had felt so clean.

The nurse spoke to us again. "Now it is time for you to leave to go to the various Joint Distribution Waiting Stations. There are busses to take you there. The following people please come with me." She called our names, along with about 10 others.

"This is your bus," she pointed to a small bus parked at the front of the hospital. "It will take you to the Lager, where you will be processed. Good luck." She walked back into the hospital.

Mama, Papa and I rode in silence, looking out of the big windows of the bus at the sights of Vienna. It was still early in the morning and the shopkeepers were washing the windows of their stores and sweeping the sidewalks. Everything was so clean, even me. I was happy because I was sure that in a very little while we would be leaving gor Palestine.

The bus stopped in front of a large building. It was square and two stories high. It had many windows and looked very much like the school I had attended in Bucharest. There was a yard in front of the building and a little park across the street.

We followed the driver inside.

"Is this the waiting station, Papa?" I asked, taking his hand.

"Yes, Imic, it must be," he replied.

A man was waiting for us as we entered. "Welcome. I am Yankel Shuster. I am in charge here. First we will begin the processing and later you will be shown your sleeping quarters. You will receive three meals a day here. All children under the age of nine will have milk each day. As I call your name, please come into my office so that we can complete your record. Everyone may be seated until your name is called."

I looked around and noticed for the first time wooden chairs lining the walls. We sat down against the wall and waited.

"Papa, what does he mean, about processing?" I asked.

"That means he will get information about us to fill out forms so that we can be on the list to go to Palestine. Chava, Imic, listen to me," he said in a low voice. "I will answer the questions when they are asked. Just keep quiet and let me anwer." We nodded and waited for our names to be called.

One by one the people went into the little office. A woman waited by the door. As they came out, she took them upstairs. I looked up to see where they were going, but the stairs curved and I couldn't see the top.

"Raboi, Velvel," the man's voice said. I jumped when Papa's name was called. He motioned for Mama and me to come with him. We went into the office and Mr. Shuster motioned for us to sit down.

"Names, please," he asked first.

Mama and I kept quiet as instructed, and Papa spoke.

"Velvel, Chava and Imic Raboi," he answered.

Mr. Shuster asked several questions about where we were born and where we had been during the war. He also wanted to know all of the names of our family who were alive and where they were now.

When Papa gave him out birthdates, he said that I was born on May 1, he was born on May 2, and Mama on May 3rd.

I wanted to tell Papa he was mistaken because I knew I was born during Hanukkah and it was snowing. Why would he have said I was born in May? He was born in May, but Mama's birthday always came during Rosh Hashana and that was in the fall. I kept quiet because I had promised I would, but I didn't understand.

"How old is the boy?" the man asked.

"Only eight," Papa said, lowering his eyes.

"Then he will get milk." He handed Papa a ticket. "Give this ticket to the woman upstairs when you go up."

Eight years old, I wasn't eight years old. I understood why Papa said that though--it was so I could have milk. I didn't like being eight years old, but I didn't say anything.

"Are there any questions? Mr. Raboi?"

Papa shook his head.

"What about you, Mrs. Raboi?"

Mama looked at Papa and then shook her head.

"And Imic, do you have a question?"

I dared not look at Papa as I said, "When will we go to Palestine?"

The man laughed and said, "You've only just arrived, lad, there are others ahead of you. You will have to wait your turn. Do you want to go to Palestine?"

"Oh, yes," I replied. "I will go to Palestine and learn to be a farmer and live on a Kibbutz. I hope I won't have to fight with the Arabs or the British though. I don't like fighting. I want to go very much," I said. Suddenly I felt my face grow red. I was embarrassed at having said so much.

"For such a young child," Mr. Shuster said, "you seem to know a lot about Palestine. You're a very smart boy."

Papa gave me a look that said "Be quiet."

I just nodded my head at Mr. Shuster and didn't say another word.

We left the office and the woman waiting outside the door took us up the winding stairs, where we entered a long hall with doors along both sides. She led us into one of the rooms and said, "These are your sleeping quarters."

I looked around the room. It looked like a schoolroom. There was a blackboard at one end but instead of desks there were beds. These beds were like nothing I had seen before. There were beds on top of other beds, with ladders to climb up on. There were many people already in the room, talking, sleeping, playing chess. People stopped what they were doing as we entered and stared at us.

"Attention," the woman said, "this is Mr. and Mrs. Raboi and their boy Imic. Mr. Zecher, please show them their beds."

A nice-looking man walked over to us and said, "Hello, I am Zecher. People call me Nitza. Please come with me."

We followed him into the crowded room. He led us to three empty beds. Blankets were hung throughout the room to divide the space between the beds. There was a large cabinet at the end of the room and Nitza showed Papa where to put our suitcase. "Can I sleep on the top, Papa?" I begged.

He laughed and agreed that I could.

I climbed up on the little metal ladder and sat on the top bed. I felt very tall as I looked down at the other people milling about the room. There seemed to be a lot of other people in this same room, many of them children. I hoped I could make friends even if we would only be here a short time. I lay back on my bed and before I knew it, I was sound asleep.

The days passed quickly for us here in Vienna. The people who lived in our room were very nice. They had all come from various parts of Europe to await passage to Palestine. Each day we heard more and more about the possibility of Palestine becoming a state. Everyone was very excited and each evening we gathered outside in the little park to discuss the day's news.

I made friends very quickly with the other children, but my special friend was Nitza. He was a little younger than my father, and he and his wife had come from Rumania two months before us. He talked to me about all kinds of things. He had been a lot of places and had met many kinds of people. He had been to the university and was considered a scholar.

He would sit with me and teach me to play chess and tell me about famous men. He taught me all about a man named Theodore Herzl, who he said was the father of Zionism. Mr. Herzl had been a writer in Vienna and had been all over the world teaching about the creation of a Jewish homeland. He had died and was buried in Vienna. Nitza promised me that he would take me to see his grave someday.

Nitza taught me about opera and ballet too. He gave me books to read written by people like Charles Dickens, Moliere and some stories written in ancient times by a man named Plato. I learned very many things from Nitza. I always wondered where he went during the morning hours. One day I asked him.

"Nitza, you leave early every morning and don't return some days until night time. Do you work?"

I knew that a few of the people that lived with us did have jobs on the outside, but I didn't think that Nitza did--especially since he never talked about his work and he always seemed to have lots of money.

"Someday I'll tell you about what I do, Imic, but not today," he replied and looked away.

Mama worried that I never played very much with the other children, but I did play with some of them.

There was one boy in particular. He and his father lived in another room. He was my age, but much bigger and stronger. He reminded me a little of Vadim. He always bragged to the younger children about how strong he was, but he didn't do that with me even though he was stronger than I was. I tried to tell him about the opera and ballet and books but he didn't seem too interested. Some mornings we would go outside and walk up and down the streets looking in the store windows and talking about what we would buy when we were rich. His name was Peter Kelso and he had lived in Poland before the war. He and his father had survived the war in a concentration camp. His mother and two sisters had been killed. He didn't talk about his family at all, but Nitza had told me about them.

One afternoon he said, "Come to the park, Imic, I have something to show you."

"I can't, Peter, I have something I want to read."

"You can read any time. Please come, Imic."

"All right, but I can't stay long."

I went to the park and followed Peter behind a clump of bushes where we sat down. It was our favorite hiding place because no one could see us unless they walked right up to us.

He reached in his shirt and pulled out a package of cigarettes.

"Where did you get that?" I asked. "Those are American Cigarettes." I recognized the camel on the package. I knew it was against the law to have American cigarettes because they were only for the American soldiers. Papa had told me that cigarette companies in America sent them free.

"I know where lots more are," he said, "as well as ladies' nylon stockings and cans of American-made milk." He beamed proudly.

"Peter," I said, frightened, "all those things aren't legal for you to have. Please tell me where you found them."

"You come with me tonight and I'll show you. But you must promise not to tell anyone, not even your mother or your father."

"What about Nitza?" I asked.

"Especially not Nitza!"

I agreed to meet Peter at 9:00.

THE BLACK MARKET

I lay on my bed listening to the adults talking about Palestine. Nitza was convinced that in a very short time Palestine would be declared a Jewish state and we could all go there freely with no waiting, with no fears about the British blockade. I believed Nitza and trusted him, so I was sure it would really happen. I listened to the bells of St. Stephen's church strike seven, then eight. At last I heard the bell striking nine. I climbed quietly out of my bed. I still had my clothes on and I silently put on my shoes. Mama and Papa were sitting with Nitza and some other people as I crept past them. I ran quickly down the stairs out of the front door. I crossed the street and waited in the bushes for Peter.

I only waited a few seconds until he appeared. "Come on, Imic, follow me."

I followed him out of the park and down a side street that ran behind our building. He stopped beside a long black car. "This is it," he said.

"Why, this is just the car that Mr. Schneider drives. We all know that he's a chauffeur for an American army officer."

"This is not just a car, Imic," Peter replied and produced a shiny key. He unlocked the car doors.

"Where did you get the key, Peter?" I asked, amazed at his bravery.

He didn't anwer me--he motioned for me to get inside the car. Peter pulled the back seat of the car up and struck a match.

I was shocked. Under the seat were two rows of wooden shelves. Lining the shelves were many brands of American cigarettes, condensed milk and ladies' stockings.

"You want something, Imic?" he asked.

I thought for a moment how happy Mama would be with a pair of nylon stockings, but then I thought how I would have to explain where they came from. I shook my head and backed out of the car. Peter took a couple of packages of cigarettes, blew out the match, closed the seat and got out of the car himself. He locked the door and said, "Now do you understand where I got the cigarettes?"

"Yes," I replied, "but what is all that stuff doing here in this car?"

"Sometimes, Imic, you are really dumb," he said with disgust. "This is black market stuff. The army officer gives it to Mr. Schneider and then he gives it to some of the men here. They sell it on the streets during the day and they split the money with Mr. Schneider who then gives some of it to the army officer."

"Well, I know all about the black market, Peter," I said, trying to sound important. "My father used to work the black market in Russia and," I added, "I used to help him, so I am not so dumb."

"Really," Peter said, obviously very impressed. He stared at me for a long time.

"I have to go back now, before I'm missed," I said, wanting desperately to get away before Peter asked me any more questions.

"Oh, by the way, Imic," he said with a sneer, "your great friend Nitza is one of the men who sells this stuff on the black market."

So that was where he went every morning. I would have to find the courage to ask Nitza about it.

I snuck back up the stairs and into our room. The grown-ups were still talking. I got back into my bed without anyone seeing me.

I thought about the black car with the foldout seat a lot over the next few weeks. I didn't tell anyone about it; I decided I would investigate this on my own. I watched the men who lived with us very carefully, and I discovered something. Each morning, as soon as breakfast was over, Nitza would call a meeting of three other men in our building. They would speak in whispers and then leave the building together. I noticed that they wore long black coats even when the day was warm. I followed them out of the building one morning. They all got into the black car and drove away.

I wanted very much to ask Nitza what it was all about, but something made me hesitate. Peter must have known what was going on, but since I had acted like I knew all about it, I didn't dare ask him. Some day I would find out for myself.

I was having breakfast one morning when Mama came running over to me.

"Guess what, Imic?" she said secretively.

"What?" I asked.

"I just found out that there is a Shomer Hatzaier group in Vienna. There are many children in the group and they have meetings and do many nice things. Would you like to join?" she asked, excited.

I thought back to the pleasant memories of my short stay in the Shomer Hatzaier camp in Mamaya. I had never dreamed that there would be a group in Vienna.

Before I could reply, Mama went on, "Just think, Imic, you can find out about Palestine and learn more songs and dances. After all, if we're going to live there, you must learn all you can."

"I would like that, Mama," I said. "When do I join?"

"This afternoon I will take you to where the meetings are held. I have something for you." She held out her hand. In it was my red scarf.

"Oh Mama, you brought it," I said joyfully. I quickly tied it around my neck.

That afternoon Mama and I took a streetcar to a place on the outskirts of Vienna. We went into a small store and up a flight of stairs to a large room filled with children. Some looked my age, others were older, a few looked younger. They were all wearing the red scarf.

Standing in front of them was a tall, well-built, deeply tanned young man.

He turned to us as we entered. "Shalom," he said, "and welcome. My name is Moshe and I am the leader. I see," he said, looking at me, "that you are wearing the red scarf. You already must be a member."

I nodded and smiled at Moshe. He looked a lot like Yakov. Maybe he knew him.

Mama said goodbye, gave me a token to use on the streetcar and left. I joined the children sitting on the floor. One boy I recognized from Budapest. We smiled and said hello and then turned our eyes to Moshe. Moshe lived in Palestine and had been sent to Vienna to train us to work on the Kibbutzim. He was speaking about Palestine and how we would go there and our parents would be allowed to work and we would all be free and happy. He told the same stories that Yakov had, and I felt the same urgency to go there. This time I knew I really would. We sang a lot of songs, some of which I knew, and others I learned. Then we all joined hands and danced while Moshe sang and played an accordion.

We said "Shalom" to each other and agreed to meet the next week.

I stood in front of the store and waited for the streetcar. It was still light outside and not too cold. I got on the streetcar and found a seat by the window. It was crowded with people going home from work. Many of the people wore a kind of costume made of green wooly material trimmed in velvet. Papa told me that this was the Austrian national dress. The children wore green leather shorts called "lederhosen" and socks to their knees. I was glad I didn't have to wear them because I was old enough to wear long pants.

The streetcar rattled along and I watched people walking along the big streets. I wondered if they all had warm houses to go home to. I imagined that they all did with big warm fireplaces and many rooms. I wished I had a room of my own. Suddenly I missed Aunt Golda very much. I wondered if I would ever see her again. She was probably married to Willy Zisser by now. I thought about Aunt Ruchel too, and Baby Mariam. She must be big. It seemed like we had been gone a long time.

I was still lost in my thoughts when the streetcar stopped and people began to get off. I looked out the window and saw a familiar figure on the sidewalk. It was Nitza. Several people were standing around him.

I yelled at him. He looked up but didn't seem to hear me. I got up and started to move towards the door, but the streetcar had started moving. I was sure that Nitza had seen me. What was he doing here on this street, far away from where we lived? Who were those people standing around him?

I still had not figured it out when I arrived at the corner where I was to get off.

I walked around to the back of the building to see if the black car was parked in its usual place. It was nowhere in sight. I was getting cold but I decided to hide behind a tree and wait for the car to return. I was sure that Nitza would be in the car. It was getting dark and I knew Mama would be worried, but I had to find out about Nitza.

I crouched down behind the tree and waited. After what seemed like a long time, I heard a car approaching. It was the black car. Suddenly I felt very guilty, like I was watching something I shouldn't see. But my curiousity was too great and I continued to watch from my secret place behind the tree.

Four men got out of the car. One of them was Nitza. He was still wearing the big coat. The light in the car was on and the door was still open. The men stood back as the driver opened the fold-out seat and the men and Nitza opened their coats and took out packages of cigarettes, cans of milk and stockings and put them on the shelves. The seat was folded back and the door closed and locked. The men went around the corner and disappeared from view. Nitza passed very close to me. I wanted to speak to him but I knew he would be angry that I had spied on him. I felt very sad because I knew the answers to my puzzle. I walked slowly into the building and Mama greeted me at the door.

"Imic, where have you been?" she said loudly. "I have been worried sick. I was just coming out to look for you." I noticed she was wearing her heavy coat. "Where have you been?" she demanded again.

I lowered my eyes so that I wouldn't have to look at her. "I'm sorry, Mama," I said quietly. "I was just walking around in the park." I hated to lie, but I knew I couldn't tell her the truth, at least not yet.

"Well, that is a silly thing to do," she said. "I thought you had more sense than that. It's dark and cold outside."

"I won't do it again, Mama," I said, feeling very sorry that I had upset her so much.

"All right, Imic. I saved you some food. Now get upstairs and eat."

She gave me a light smack on the rear and I scooted upstairs.

The first person I saw was Nitza. He had the chess board set up and was waiting for me. I couldn't look at him. I ate the food that Mama had saved and explained to Nitza that I didn't feel well and needed to go to bed. He looked me in the eye and said, "Maybe you did too much, today Imic. I hear you went to a meeting of the Shomer Hatzaier. I would like to hear about your day. Maybe some other time."

I went to my bed and pulled up the covers over my head. Nitza must know that I had seen him. I closed my eyes to block out the sight of his eyes looking at me. I really did feel sick, I told myself.

Papa came over to me and laid his hand on the covers.

"What is the matter, Imic?" he questioned.

"Nothing, Papa," I lied. "I just don't feel well."

"Why don't you and I go down the hall to the little room at the end where no one will hear us, and you can tell me what is bothering you. For several weeks now you have not been yourself. Come with me, son."

So Papa knew that I had been investigating. I followed him to the little room that had probably once been a big closet and we sat down on two straight-back wooden chairs.

"Now, talk to me, Imic," he said.

Suddenly the tears came out and in a flood of relief I told him the whole story about Peter and the cigarettes, the black car, Nitza, and everything I had seen.

He sat for a long time listening to me go on and on with my fears, suspicions and my anger that my wonderful friend, Nitza, would be selling things on the black market.

At last he spoke.

"Imic, you know that I have always told you the truth about everything and I have never lied to you. Haven't I?"

I nodded my head, and he continued.

"There are many people like Nitza and myself, other Jews, who have had to do things in the last few years that we would rather not have done. We have been forced to do things in order to survive. Remember in Brichen when your uncles and myself slaughtered cattle in the cellar and sold it from the backyard. We had to do that because it was against the law to own your own business in a Communist state. I was determined that my family would not go hungry ever again, even if it meant working the black market. The sack you took to the police station each week was protection money. I paid the police not to shut the business down, and it worked for a long time. I didn't like doing that, but I had no choice.

"Then in Bucharest, when the Communists t-ok over, Abrasha and I still owned the taxis. That was illegal too, but we needed the money. We would not have been able to escape if I couldn't have paid for Zanvel's services. Do you understand at all?"

"Yes, I do understand. But the Communists haven't taken over Vienna," I said.

"That's right, Imic, but here in Vienna we, the Jews, are nobody. We are people without a country, without a home. That is why we are called DPs--displaced persons. We have no citizenship and we are not allowed by law to work. Yet it takes money to live and to go to Palestine. One must have money. So, you see, in order to survive, sometimes you must do things that you know are wrong." He sighed and looked at me.

"But the nurse at the Rothschild Hospital. She said she was waiting to go to Palestine, and that she is a DP. Why is she working?"

"Imic, there are some situations that are different. The Rothschild Hospital is a Jewish hospital. It was built with money from Jewish people. Some Jews who have professions like nurses and doctors must work so that the rest of us can have help if we need it. There are exceptions to every rule. There always has been and there always will be. As you get older, you will understand more about what I am telling you.

"Your friend Nitza is a wonderful man. What he is doing is necessary so that he can start a new life in Palestine. Do not think less of him as a man."

I listened carefully to what Papa said, and I thought about it for a long time before I spoke. Finally I said, "I think I understand, Papa. Sometimes, because of other people, Jews have to do things just so they can live."

"That's right, son," he said sadly.

"Well, when we get to Palestine, Papa, all of that will change because even though nobody else wants Jews, we will be wanted there," I said, very sure of what I was saying.

"I hope you're right, Imic," he said.

PAPA GETS SICK

Nitza and I could now talk—about the black market business. He even showed me his coat. It had big bands of elastic sewn in it and all his merchandise fit right inside. I guess the police just looked the other way when they saw Nitza, or maybe he gave them a sack of money like Papa used to do.

I grew to like Vienna very much. We were free to do what we wanted here except work. Each month a few people would be called to the office and we all knew that meant it was their turn to go to Palestine. That was always a joyful time. We would celebrate each month and say goodbye. It was also a little sad to see them go, but we all knew we would be together again in Palestine.

It was winter now and very cold. Not nearly as cold as Brichen, but it still snowed a lot. A big iron stove stood in the middle of the room, and we would gather around it to keep ourselves warm.

One night about six months after Papa and I had talked about the black market, he came to me and said, "Imic, I have something to tell you, and I hope you will understand."

"What is it, Papa?" I said. I was afraid of what he would say.

"Nitza came to me this morning and asked me to join him in the business. Mr. Marcu used to work with Nitza selling on the street, but you know he has gone to Palestine. Nitza has asked me to take his place. I wanted to tell you about this myself and ask you to understand. The more money we have, the better chance we have of doing well in Palestine."

"I understand, Papa," I said. "Can I come with you?"

"Not just yet, Imic, maybe later." He kissed me goodnight.

"Thank you for telling me, Papa," I said, throwing my arms around his neck and hugging him.

So Papa now left each morning and returned late each evening wearing the long black coat. He always looked tired, but he never complained. Each evening he would sit with Mama and me, and we would count the money he made during the day. Mama was in charge of the money. She carefully put it away in a little pouch. Soon the pouch was very full.

It was so cold outside now, yet Papa went each day and walked the streets selling his merchandise. Mama was always scolding him for not wearing warm enough clothes and not eating enough.

Papa had been selling for months, and our money pouch was bulging. Mama always kept it with her wherever she went. I continued to beg to go with Papa, but each time he told me it was too cold.

One morning I saw Papa still in bed. "What's the matter Papa?" I asked. "Is it Saturday?" Papa never worked on the Sabbath.

"No, Imic. I'm not feeling well. Must just be a cold. I'll be better soon, I'm sure."

I could see that it was more than just a cold. I was frightened at the way he looked. His skin was a strange color, sort of yellow, and his eyes looked like they were sunk back in his head. I touched his cheek. His face was burning. Just then Mama appeared carrying a pan of water and a cloth. She bathed Papa's face with the wet cloth. She too looked frightened.

Papa lay in his bed all that day and the next. He didn't eat at all, only a little soup, and Mama had to beg him to eat that. Finally I couldn't stand watching him anymore. He looked so sick and so tired. I waited outside that night for Nitza to return. He would know what to do.

When the car pulled up to the curb, I ran to Nitza and pulled at his sleeve.

"Imic, what's wrong? You look like you've seen a ghost."

"Nitza, it's my Papa. He is very sick. His skin is yellow and he's getting worse. I'm so afraid he'll die. Oh please, Nitza, please do something," I begged.

Nitza picked me up and said, "I'll see what I can do, Imic. Don't worry, your Papa won't die. He is a strong man, and he has a strong will. He'll get better. Now let's go have a look at him."

We went to Papa's bed. Mama was sitting beside him, bathing his face with the cloth.

After a close look at Papa, Nitza said, "Chava, why didn't you tell me Velvel was so sick? I thought he just had a cold. He needs to see a doctor. I'll make arrangements to take him to the Rothschild Hospital."

My Mama began to cry. "Oh Nitza, I begged him to let me tell you, but he kept insisting that he would be all right and that he didn't want to cause you any trouble. I should have come to you, but I didn't know what to do."

"It's all right, Chava, I'll take care of everything. Get his coat on him and I'll be back in a few moments." Walking fast, he left the room.

Mama and I got Papa's coat on him. His whole body seemed to be on fire. He didn't even know we were here with him. He seemed to be asleep. Mama kept talking to him like he was awake, but he didn't answer. Sometimes he would moan, but most of the time he was quiet, only his breathing sounded strange. It seemed like he couldn't get enough air.

Nitza returned with three men. I knew them all--they lived in the same building. They lifted Papa carefully out of his bed and carried him down the steps. I ran ahead to open the doors. Papa would be so upset, if he knew he had to be carried, I thought to myself.

Nitza reached into his pocket and handed me a key. "Unlock the door, Imic."

It was the black car. I opened the door. My hand was shaking so badly I could hardly do it. The men placed Papa on the back seat and Nitza and I got in the front. Mama sat in the back with Papa, holding his head in her lap.

Nitza drove very fast through the black streets. It had not snowed for a long time, but there was still snow on the ground. The ground was icy from the melting snow and we slid as we turned the corner and stopped in front of the hospital.

Nitza got out, told us to wait in the car, and ran inside.

I looked back at Papa and in the dim light from the street lamp. His face was so still. Maybe he was dead. A cold chill shot through me and I felt as if I was going to scream.

Nitza returned with two men wheeling something that looked like a bed. In a few seconds they had Papa out of the car and onto the bed. He moaned as he was moved, and I knew he wasn't dead. I felt better immediately.

Nitza put one arm around Mama and the other around me, and we walked into the hospital. A nurse told us that Papa was being examined by a doctor and for us to wait.

We sat huddled together, not speaking, just waiting for some word. Finally, sometime early in the morning, a man appeared, spoke briefly to the nurse and walked toward us. I immediately recognized him. He was the doctor who had given us the examination when we arrived in Vienna, the one I had kicked. He looked very tired and spoke slowly and quietly. "Mrs. Raboi," he said looking at Mama, "your husband is going to be all right. He's very sich and it's good that you brought him here. Now, I must ask you for a few questions."

My Papa was going to be all right. The doctor had said so!

"Has your husband ever been ill before the way he is now?"

"Once, when he was in the Russian army," she said quietly, "he was in a hospital with yellow fever. But he never seemed this sick before."

"Thank you, Mrs. Raboi," the doctor said. "He will have to be here for at least a week, maybe more. He will be very weak for a month or so when he leaves the hospital. He may get up and walk around, but he must remain very quiet."

"Thank you, Doctor," Nitza said. "Can Mrs. Raboi see him now?"

"Yest, but only for a moment," the doctor replied. "Come with me."

Nitza and I sat and waited for Mama to return. I closed my eyes and leaned against Nitza.

Mama looked better when she came back from seeing Papa.

We left the hospital and it was morning. We had been there all night.

I TRY TO GROW UP

After a week, just as the doctor had promised, Papa came homw. He had had yellow fever, but with the proper diet and rest he would be fine. He looked good to me, and I hugged him.

"Papa," I said, "I missed you so much. How do you feel?"

"Better, Imic," he replied, but he sounded very tired.

He slept most of the time the first few days, only waking up to eat. Nitza arranged for Papa to have the foods he needed to get well. After a while, he was able to walk around for a few minutes each day. His old color was beginning to return and much of the yellow was gone. But the doctor had said it would be at least a month before he could get out of bed for a whole day.

I looked at his long black coat hanging in the closet near his bed, wondering when he would be able to put it on again and go back to work

Suddenly an idea struck me. I could take his place. I could wear the coat and go with Nitza to the street.

I was standing by his bed when he opened his eyes and smiled at me.

"Hello, Imic," he said sleepily. "How long have you been standing here?"

"All afternoon, Papa. I have something to tell you."

"Yes, Imic, what is it?"

"Well, Papa," I began trying to sound very grown up, "you know the doctor said it would be a month before you would be well enough to get up. I thought that during that time, I could take your place on the street. I know what to do and I could go with Nitza. I could earn money for us while you're sick." I finished and looked at him pleadingly.

"Oh, Imic," he sighed, "I appreciate the fact that you want to help, but you're still a little boy and I don't think it's a good idea. Have you asked your Mama?"

"Well, no," I said, "I haven't, but if you say I can, she won't mind." I knew my Mama wouldn't like it one bit, but I also knew if Papa was convinced, she would be too.

At last he said, "We'll talk to Nitza about it and see what he thinks." He closed his eyes and seemed to go back to sleep.

"Thank you, Papa," I whispered, and tiptoed away from his bed.

I waited patiently for Nitza to return from work. He saw quickly that I was very excited about something, and he took me for a walk in the park.

"Now, Imic, tell me--what's on your mind?"

"Nitza," I began, "I have this wonderful idea. Papa said to talk to you about it."

"Well, let's heat it." He smiled at me.

I told him my plan. "And I can wear his coat and go with you each morning," I finished.

He looked doubtfully at me. "Please Nitza, I won't be any trouble. I know I can do it. Oh, say yes, Nitza, please."

"What does your Mama say?" he said.

I looked down and kicked at the ground. "Well, I haven't exactly asked her. But if you say I can, I know she won't mind."

"I'll tell you what, Imic," he said after a while. "I'll discuss it with your Mama and Papa tonight. If we decide yes, then you will come with me tomorrow. If we decide no, then you must not speak of it again. Is that fair?"

"Oh yes, Nitza," I said, and threw my arms around his neck.

"Hey," he said, "we haven't decided yet."

We went back inside and Nitza told me to wait. He went into our little room and drew the blankets closed. I couldn't stand not knowing so I crept over and listened.

"Now, Chava, I know you're worried," Nitza was saying. "But I'll take care of Imic. He wants to do this for his Papa very much and I think he should be allowed to try it. If he gets too tired or cold, I'll send him home on the streetcar."

"But Nitza, what if he gets caught?" Mama said.

"I'll take him where the police know me. For the money I pay them they'll look the other way."

"I just don't know--he's so young," Mama said.

Papa spoke. "He's only young in years, Chava. But he's a lot older than his years. Imic has lived through a lot. If Nitza thinks it's all right, I say we should let him go."

There was a long silence.

"Well," Mama said, "I can see I'm outvoted. I don't like it, but I guess he can go."

Nitza came out. He saw me and held out his hand. "Welcome to the business, partner."

Early the next morning Nitza and I joined the other men at the car. He must have already told them I was taking Papa's place because they didn't act surprised to see me. Mama had pinned up the coat so it would almost fit, and they did grin at my coat. We got into the car and filled our coats with merchandise. Sitting with all the cigarettes and cans of milk inside felt very heavy and uncomfortable. Finally it was time for Nitza and me to get out on the street where the movie houses were located.

"Well, here we are, Imic," Nitza said, adjusting his coat. "Soon this street will be filled with people on their way to work. And every two hours when a movie is over, more people will pass us here.

"Listen carefully, Imic," Nitza went on. "First, just stand and pretend you are looking into the store window. You see that policeman on the corner?"

I nodded.

"As long as he's here everything is safe. When he leaves it is time for us to move to another street. People will come up to us and I'll talk as if we were having a friendly conversation. Always let them ask for what they want first. Give it to them--but only after they give you the money. The cigarettes are on your left side, the milk and stockings on your right. Do it quickly so you don't attract attention. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I think so," I said. It sounded harder than I had expected. Somehow I just thought I would say, "Do you want to buy something?"

"You watch me, Imic, and you'll learn. Are you afraid?"

"Just a little."

"So was I, the first time," Nitza admitted. "But most of the people are old customers and they know what the black coat means."

Just then a little man with round glasses and a beret walked up. Nitza and I pretended to be looking in the store window. I was so nervous I didn't even know what kind of store it was.

"Do you have a match?" the little man said. Nitza shook his head. "How about a cigarette?" Then, in a low voice, "American?"

"Which brand?" Nitza answered.

"Camel," the man replied, and held out his hand. Nitza took the money and put a package of Camels in the man's open palm. He nodded and walked away.

So that was how it was done. It seemed easy enough. "Let me try the next one, Nitza," I said.

"All right, Imic."

I didn't have to wait long. A beautiful young woman approached us, wearing a white fur coat that must have cost a lot of money. "Nylons, please." She held out money. I took it and suddenly panicked. I couldn't remember which side the nylons were on. Just as suddenly I remembered. I reached inside on the right, pulled them out of the elastic and handed them to her. She smiled, put them into her shopping bag and walked away.

This was easy. I handed Nitza the money, but he said, "You keep your own money, Imic. Put it into the pocket of your coat. At the end of the day you get part of it and the other part goes to the driver who pays the army officer for the merchandise."

We were very busy. Every few minutes someone would walk up to us and ask for something. The day went by so fast that I was surprised when Nitza said it was time to go. "We did very well today, Imic," he said.

My coat was much lighter than it had been when we started. I couldn't wait to show Mama and Papa how much I had made in one day. I knew Papa would be pleased that I had done so well.

OUR TURN!

When I came home with Nitza one day about a month later, Papa told me that the doctor had told him he was completely well. He could go back to work the next day.

I was glad that Papa was well, but I felt sad that I could no longer go with the men. Of course, I had missed the Shomer Hatzaier meetings and going to the movies with Peter, but I had enjoyed being grownup for that month.

Papa went back to work the next morning and Peter and I went to the movies. We stayed all day, seeing a double feature twice, and got home late in the afternoon. When I walked into our room, I knew something was different. The people we lived with looked at me and smiled. There were several women talking to Mama and everyone seemed very excited. Mama was crying, but she didn't look sad.

I rushed over, sat down beside her and waited. Papa came in at that moment and he too came directly over to Mama. He looked at me as if to ask what was going on and I just shrugged my shoulders. Then Mama saw him.

"Oh, Velvel," she threw her arms around him. "We've been called. It's our turn to go," she sobbed.

I couldn't believe it. I jumped up and screamed. Palestine at last, we were going to Palestine! Everyone was laughing and crying with us.

Papa was as surprised as I was. "Tell me, Chava, tell me everything."

"This afternoon, they told me at the office that our turn had come. Tomorrow Imic and I will have a complete medical examination at the Rothschild Hospital. They've just seen you, Velvel, so you don't have to go. Then in about a week we'll go to Italy. From there, a ship will take us to Palestine." She was still crying as she finished.

The rest of the evening was like a dream. In two weeks I would be in Palestine. The people in our building kept coming over to congratulate us on our good fortune. At last we could be free, at last we wouldn't be displaced persons, at long last we would have a home.

THE DISAPPOINTMENTS

Mama and I went through our examinations at the Rothschild Hospital. The doctor took pictures of my chest. He listened to me breathe and hammered on my knees again. He checked my throat, eyes, ears and nose and felt around my stomach. When it was all over, he told us we would know the results in two days.

We went back to our building in high spirits. We knew we were well and of course, Papa was well now, too.

Mama washed all of our clothes and packed them. Papa took a little of our money and bought a few new things for each of us. He bought me a bright blue sweater and a new pair of shoes.

Nitza, his wife, Mama and Papa talked late into the night and decided we would all meet in Palestine and Papa and Nitza could go into some kind of business together. Maybe Papa would be a butcher again. I knew we would see Aunt Golda and Aunt Ruchel again soon. Maybe they were already there. We hadn't heard from them in a long time.

Two days passed. On the evening of the second day, Mama and Papa were called to the office. I waited upstairs with Nitza for them to return. They were gone for a long time. I kept running to the door and looking down the hall. Finally I heard them coming and I ran to meet them.

Mama was crying hysterically and Papa seemed to be holding her up so she wouldn't fall. His face was white and his eyes were red.

I got very scared. Nitza stood beside me, looking questioningly at my parents.

They didn't speak, but just walked into our little room and sat down on the bed. Nitza closed the blankets and motioned for me to wait. I couldn't stand it. I felt like I was going to be sick. I finally pushed the blankets aside and went in, too.

Nitza had his arms around Mama and Papa. They were both sitting with their heads buried in their hands.

Nitza saw me and called me to him. I went and sat on his lap wide-eyed with fear.

"Imic, I have some very bad news for you," he began slowly.

"What's the matter with Mama?" I cried with terror in my voice.

"Your Mama is fine."

"Then what is it?"

"The doctor waw a little spot on one of your lungs in the X ray. He is afraid you have tuberculosis."

"What's that?" I cried. "I'm not sick. I feel fine. That doctor doesn't know what he's doing." I sank to the floor and kicked and pounded with my hands and feet. "No, no, it can't be true!"

At last Nitza picked me up and held me tightly. "Imic," he said in a firm voice. "You must listen to me. You will still be able to go to Palestine. The doctors know how to make you well. It will just take a little longer than you had planned. You are a brave, strong boy, and I know you will ge twell soon."

I stopped crying. "But Nitza, what about Mama and Papa?"

Papa answered. "Imic, as soon as you are well, we will all to to Palestine together. The important thing is for you to get well."

Mama put her arms around my neck. She put her cheek next to mine.

"I'm sorry, Mama. I'm sorry I had to get whatever I've got. Please don't be angry at me."

"Oh, Imic," she cried, "I'm not angry at you. I love you and want you to get well so that we can all go together and live in Palestine."

I cried and cried that night. I was so scared about having tuberculosis, especially because I didn't even know what it was. Nitza came to say goodnight, and he sat and held my hand until I fell asleep.

Early the next morning I was taken to the Rothschild Hospital, to a ward with other children who had the same illness I did. I still couldn't believe that there was anything wrong with me because, except for a cough, I felt just fine. The doctor explained to me all about TB, as he called it. He said I would need fresh air, lots of food and medicine.

I didn't like staying in the hospital because Mama and Papa couldn't stay with me. I guess the other children were nice, but I didn't talk to them. What upset me the most was that we had missed our turn to go XXXXXX to Palestine and it might be a long time before we were called again.

Nitza came very early every morning to see me. He told me about funny things that happened on the street, and also talked a lot about Palestine. Nitza believed it was only a matter of time before

Palestine would be declared a state. He said that it might even happen before we went there.

I had been in the hospital five or six days when Nitza, Mama and Papa came to see me.

Nitza spoke first. "Imic, I have just found out that there is a place in a country called Switzerland where children who have TB are treated. It is a beautiful place, high in the mountains. They have special doctors there who are specialists in helping children get well. The Joint Distribution Agency runs it, and we want you to go there."

"I don't want to go away," I cried. "I don't want to leave you, and Mama and Papa. Please don't send me away."

"Imic," Mama said softly, "we don't want you to leave us either, but the doctors feel that you would get well faster there. And, the sooner you get well, the sooner we will be able to go to Palestine."

"What do you think, Papa?" I asked, hoping he would disagree with Mama, Nitza and the doctors.

"I think that you need to get well. Even though I will miss you very much, it is impottant that you get the best medical attention available."

So, they all agreed! I would have to go. I turned my face away so they wouldn't see my tears. "How long will I be gone?" I asked, choking on my words.

"We don't know yet, Imic," Nitza answered. "It all depends on how fast you get well."

"When do I have to leave?" I asked, staring at the ceiling.

"You will go by train. The other children in the hospital will be going with you, along with a nurse. She'll take care of everything on the trip," Nitza said.

"But when?" I asked flatly.

Nitza, Mama and Papa looked at each other. Finally Papa spoke. "Tomorrow morning, Imic."

"Tomorrow," I cried, "that's too soon." The tears were coming fast. I hid my face in the pillow to stop them.

A nurse came and said it was time for my medicine. Nitza, Mama and Papa hugged and kissed me and left. After they had gone, I lay very still just staring at the wall. I couldn't imagine being away from my family and Nitza. I had been to camp before, but that was different. I didn't want to leave them. I felt so little and so alone. Very gradually I fell asleep. My dreams were terrible.

Mama, Papa and Nitza arrived soon after breakfast the next morning. We went to the train station where we joined all the other children. There were about ten of us.

I remember very little about saying goodbye or the train ride to Switzerland because for most of the trip I felt like I was in a dense fog.

The train stopped at a little wooden station high in the mountains. The air was very cold and felt good after the hot train. A bus was waiting for us. I felt a little like I did when I went to camp on the Black Sea. The train ride and then a bus ride.

The bus took us higher into the mountains. I looked down and was astounded at how tiny the train station looked now. At last we came to a sign that was written in a strange language with an arrow. Within a few minutes we saw the hospital--it was called a sanitorium. It was beautiful. The nurse told us that it was once a resort hotel for rich people, but since the was the Joint Distribution Committee rented it so that children from all over Europe with TB could come here to get well. It looked like a gigantic house with a porch high off the ground that went all around the building. The porch was painted white and the wood on the building was a dark rich brown. Behind the building was the highest mountain I had ever seen anywhere. I couldn't see the top of it; there were too many clouds. The clouds seemed very close to me as if I could reach out and grab some of them.

The nurse gave us a tour of the sanitorium and introduced us to the staff. There were two doctors here, one a man and the other a woman. I had never seen a woman doctor before. I was very surprised. Then we were introduced to our counselors, Aria, the boys' counselor, and Genevieve, the girls' counselor. They were from France and had worked here since the Joint Distribution Committee rented the place.

I had never thought we would have counselors. This was like a camp, not a hospital. And Genevieve was the most beautiful girl I had ever seen. She was tall and had long blond braids and the bluest eyes. She spoke to us in Yiddish and I didn't hear a word she said. I just kept staring at her. I couldn't believe she was Jewish. I had never seen a Jewish girl with blond hair and blue eyes before.

Aria, the boys' counselor, was very handsome. He had light brown hair and a wonderful curving moustache. He also had blue eyes and very light skin. I guess I had always thought that all Jews looked like me--dark hair and dark eyes. I was surprised; I would have to ask Nitza about this.

There were two large rooms, one for the girls and one for the boys. The rooms had closets and chests with big comfortable chairs and tables. But no beds.

"This will be your room," Aria said to the other five boys and myself.

"But there are no beds," I said aloud.

Aria laughed. "Oh, yes, I forgot to tell you. You sleep on special mats outside on the porch so that your lungs will be filled with fresh air."

He showed us the porch. There was no roof and heavy mats with blankets and pillows lay on the floor. I could see the mountain, but I still couldn't see the top. I had never been anywhere like this before. Everything was so clean and fresh smelling. If only Papa and Mama were with me.

THE SANITORIUM—AND ISRAEL!

There were about 40 other children here from all over Europe. We all had three things in common. We all had TB, we were all DPs and we all wanted to go to Palestine. We settled into the routines very quickly.

Each morning we would have a huge breakfast: eggs, rolls, chocolate, and big glasses of fresh milk. After breakfast we would go for long hikes in the mountains with our counselors, then back to the dining room for lunch. I had never seen or eaten so much food in my life. The afternoons were spent resting, reading or writing letters and then around 4:00 we would go for another hike in the fresh air. Dinner was at six and another big meal was served. At night we would sing, dance and play games.

Just before bedtime we would each get a shot of medicine. The shots hurt a lot, but I was sure they were making me well, so I tried not to mind. We slept on the porch looking up at the stars. The night air was very cold and I would pull the warm blankets up to my nose to keep out the cold air.

The children here were nice but I hadn't made any close friends. I would write long letters to Mama, Papa, Nitza and Peter. I missed them very much. I cried myself to sleep almost every night. One night Genevieve noticed that I was crying.

"What's the matter, my little Imic?" she said in her soft voice.

"Nothing," I said, very embarrassed.

"Let me guess," she said. "You are sad because you're very homesick."

"Homesick?" I had never heard that word before.

"That means that you miss your mother and father very much. Even though you try not to cry, you can't help it. It's like your heart is hurting and suddenly tears come from nowhere. Isn't that so?"

"Yes, that's exactly what happens," I said amazed. How did you know?"

"Because I have felt that way too. Even though I'm grown up, I still miss my parents very much sometimes."

"But do you ever cry?"

"Sometimes," she said, "but it gets easier the older you get not to cry. So you see, you're not alone. Many people get homesick, and there is really no cure except to stay very busy and try not to think about it." She kissed my cheek and turned to go.

"Genevieve," I said shyly, "could we talk again another time?"

"Of course," she said. "Now it is late and you must sleep."

"All right." Suddenly I felt much better. Someone understood and I was not alone. "I'm going to be all right, Papa," I whispered to myself.

The summer passed quickly. I felt better than I ever had. I ate well, slept well and played hard all day. The other children and I became good friends.

Genevieve and Aria told us wonderful stories of Palestine and I knew in my heart I would see her again there. We talked of it often. She knew all about our plans for going before I got sick.

I was still very lonely and missed my Mama and Papa very much, but I didn't feel quite so bad. I got a letter twice a week from Mama and Nitza also wrote each week.

Peter's family had left for Palestine, as well as some of the other families who had lived with us in Vienna. I knew in a few short months we would be there too.

One night in early October we had just gone to bed when Aria and Genevieve came to us, very excited.

"Get up, children, get up," they said. "Come with us to the dining room."

We all sat around the big radio in the dining room and listened. A man's voice was speaking: "Today the United Nations Palestine Committee began its debates. Both the United States of America and Russia came out in favor of partition and the creation of a separate entity that would be Jewish Palestine."

There was a loud cheer at the announcement.

Aria turned off the radio and explained that now the 56 nations that belonged to the organization called the United Nations would vote on the partition plan. If it passed then Palestine would become a Jewish state.

In the days that followed, we talked of little else. Aria told us about how Great Britain's foreign minister, Mr. Ernest Bevan, had ordered the Exodus 1947 to return to Germany. It was carrying 4,000 Jewish refugees. There were transferred to three British transport ships that sailed for 46 days, in scorching heat across the Mediterranean, around the coast of Spain, through the English Channel and across the North Sea to Germany. Newspapers wrote up the story all around the world, and everyone was upset with Mr. Bevan and Great Britain.

"Then," Aria said, "two British sargeants were hung by a group of Jews in Palestine called the Irgun. After that there were no more executions. The British were scared now, so they referred the Palestine question to the United Nations."

We listened as he told us more stories of the British and Palestine. I became fascinated with the group of young Jewish men and women in Palestine called the Haganah. Aria's brother was a member and he told me some of the brave things they did. When the little battered ships arrived at the shores of Palestine with the illegal Jewish immigrants, the ships were immediately surrounded by British police and navy boats and ordered to go away. The ships were filled with thousands of Jews when they were only built for a few hundred people. The Haganah would come out in tugboats and rowboats in the middle of the night. They took the immigrants off the boats one by one, shaking hands, saying, "Shalom and welcome home." On shore there were more boys and girls from Haganah. These were carrying guns. As the newly arrived immigrants walked through the fields, more Haganah members stood guard. There was a chain of them lined all the way to the settlement where the immigrants would be safe. As each new immigrant passed by, the Haganah member smiled and called quietly, "Shalom, and welcome home."

It was November and the weather turned very cold. It snowed daily and the leaves were gone from the trees. Twice each month we went by bus to a small clinic where we had X rays taken. The doctors never told us anything; they just smiled at us. I had the feeling that I would be leaving the sanitorium soon. My days were filled with thoughts of the Haganah and stories about Palestine. I now knew much more than I did before I left Vienna. I thought that everything in Palestine was perfect before I left, but now I realized that even there Jews had to fight for survival. This knowledge made me a little sad, but I was more determined than ever to go there and help build a new country.

Aria woke me up very early one morning. "Imic," he shook me, "wake up, I have some good news for you."

"What is it?"

"The doctor wants to see you. Get your clothes on. He thinks you're well now. You can go back to Vienna and your parents if he releases you."

I looked at him in astonishment. I couldn't believe it. I had waited for those words for such a long time, now it had finally happened.

I scrambled into my sweater and pants, put my shoes and socks on and grabbed my hat and coat, and ran to meet Aria by his little car. I was so excited that I never stopped talking until we arrived at the clinic.

I had a check just like I had had many times before. The doctor smiled and shook my hand. "Well, Imic, you are well now. I can find no trace of tuberculosis. Your lungs are clear and you may go home to your parents."

I threw my arms around his neck and hugged him hard.

"Do my parents know, Aria?" I asked on the way back to the sanitorium.

"No, not yet. We didn't want to notify them until we were sure. We'll send a telegram tonight. You help write it." He smiled and squeezed my hand.

"When do I leave, Aria?" I asked, suddenly feeling a little sad.

"Tomorrow, Imic," he said. "I have to go to Vienna tomorrow to pick up new children, and I'll go with you on the train."

We returned to the sanitorium just as the other children were coming in to breakfast. As soon as everyone was seated, Aria stood up. "I have an announcement to make. Our friend Imic Raboi has just seen the doctor. He is well now, and tomorrow he leaves for Vienna. We will all miss him, but of course we'll all meet him again in Palestine." Everyone cheered.

That evening we were all gathered around the radio, listening to the news as we did each evening, when the announcer said:

"We interrupt this broadcast to bring you a special bulletin. Today the United Nations voted to partition Palestine and create a Jewish state."

Suddenly we realized what had happened. Everyone began to yell and cry and jump up and down.

Aria ran to the kitchen and came back with two bottles of milk. We all drank a toast to the new Jewish state. It was November 29, 1948.

VIENNA AND THE SHOCK

The next morning I went to tell Genevieve goodbye. She was sitting very quietly in her room staring out at the mountain. The radio was on by her side. I could see she had been crying.

"Genevieve, what's wrong?" I asked. "Why are you crying?"

"Oh, Imic, things are very bad in Palestine. Palestinian Arabs have killed seven Jews near Tel Aviv. Even though the U.N. has voted, it seems the Arabs have taken up the war. And we all thought that now Palestine would be safe for the Jews. But come--I'm sorry to be so upset on your last morning here--set beside me."

She put her arm around my shoulders. "Imic, I want you to write to me and tell me all about what you're doing and when you'll be leaving for Palestine. I'm planning to go there myself within the next few months," she said.

"You mean you're leaving here that soon?"

"Yes. I feel I am needed more in Palestine. I want to help our people build a state."

"How will I find you, Genevieve?"

"My sister lives in Haifa. She'll know where I am." She wrote the name and address on a piece of paper and handed it to me.

"I will find you again Genevieve," I said. I knew that as soon as we arrived I would look for her.

"I'll miss you, Imic. You've become a very special friend of mine while you were here. Please write to me." She kissed my cheek and I got up and backed out of the door.

I could feel the hot tears coming to my eyes. I must not let Genevieve see me cry. I turned and ran down the steps and outside where Aria was waiting to drive us to the train.

The trip to Vienna was uneventful. I thought a lot about Genevieve. Her kindness, her gentleness and beauty made me think I had known her a lot longer than the seven months I had been in Switzerland. I felt as though I had known her before and somehow she was grown up and I was not. I thought about that several times throughout the afternoon.

Suddenly it hit me. The reason I felt Genevieve was an old friend suddenly grown up was because she was very much like Manya. Manya was beautiful, kind and gentle, and I was her special friend also. Manya had blond braids like Genevieve, and very blue eyes.

I hadn't thought of Manya in a long time. I tried not to think of her because I realized I would probably never see her again, and that made me sad. Now was not the time to feel sad--not now that we were going to Palestine.

When we pulled into the station the first people I saw were Mama, Papa and Nitza.

As soon as I stepped down from the train platform, they grabbed me and hugged and kissed me. We were all crying and Mama kept saying how much I had grown and how healthy I looked.

Aria came to us and I introduced him to my family. He said a few words and whispered to me, "Next year in Jerusalem," and walked away.

I shouted after him, "I'll be there, Aria," but he was lost in the crowd.

Mama and Papa asked me many questions on the way to our building. I told them about hearing on the radio the wonderful news about Palestine. I told them about Genevieve and Aria, and all the children, and how we were all going to meet again in Palestine and work together to create a new state. The more I talked the more excited I became. I noticed Mama and Papa and Nitza exchanging looks as I talked, but I didn't pay much attention. I was too excited.

I guess I expected us to leave for Palestine as soon as I returned, and I couldn't understand why we weren't making plans to leave. Papa was still working the black market with Nitza. It seemed like nothing had changed, almost as if I had never been away.

Whenever I would bring up the question of leaving, Mama and Papa would look at each other and Papa would say it was not time yet.

I had been back in Vienna almost a month now and still we were not preparing to leave. Finally I couldn't stand it any longr and I said to Mama, "When are we going, Mama? Isn't it time yet? I know we have money to go."

She looked at me a long time before she spoke. "Imic, I think you better have a talk with your Papa."

So something was wrong! I remembered the first day when I returned from Switzerland and the look I had seen pass between Mama and Papa.

"You tell me, Mama," I demanded. "I know something is the matter. I must know what's wrong. Please tell me."

She turned away from me and her body stiffened. In a choking voice she repeated, "Talk to your Papa."

Something terrible must have happened. Maybe Mama or Papa was sick and wouldn't tell me. Maybe something had happened to Aunt Golda or Aunt Ruchel.

I waited for Papa to return. I stood beside the curb where the car would stop. When I saw Papa I went right over to him. "Papa," I said, "could I speak with you?"

"Yes of course, Imic," he replied, putting his arm around me. "Let's go inside."

"No, Papa, I want to have a private talk with you," I said.

"My, but you sound serious," he said, "and certainly grown-up. Well, let's walk over to the cafe and talk."

We found a table in the brightly lit garden. A band was playing on the other side of the garden and some people were dancing.

I had never been to a cafe before. I knew Papa and Nitza came here on occasions to drink a beer or two, but I had never been allowed to come.

"Imic," Papa began, "I'm glad we came here. I've wanted to speak to you for some time now, but it never seemed to be the right time."

"And I've wanted to speak to you too," I confessed. "Do you want to talk first or shall I?" I asked.

"I have a feeling," Papa said, "that we are both thinking the same thing, so I'll go first. But first you and I will have a beer."

"Me?" I asked in disbelief. "A beer?"

"Yes, Imic. I think this is as good a time as any." He signaled a waiter.

The beer arrived in tall glass mugs. The mugs were frosty and heavy. I tasted it. It was awful. "Why would anyone drink this stuff, Papa?" I asked.

He laughed. "You have to get used to it, and then it tastes good." I wondered if I ever would.

"Now for our talk, Imic," he began. He didn't look at me, but seemed to be staring into the half-empty beer glass. "I want to talk to you about Palestine."

"Yes, Papa," I said, half afraid to hear what he had to say.

"Imic, I know no way of making this easy for you so I will just come right out and say it. We are going to America, not to Palestine. Two months ago, Mr. Schwartz, the director of the Joint Distribution Agency in Vienna, came to our building. He had a newspaper in his hand. There were advertisements in the pages from people in America. They were looking for anybody from their families who was still alive.

"Well, there was a notice from a woman named L. Shainberg in a place called Memphis, Tennessee. She is my mother's sister. She left Rumania to go to America long before you were born, even before I was born. She wants us to come to America and live in Memphis, Tennessee."

I couldn't believe it. This was someone else talking, not my father. It could not be. I felt myself going into shock. Suddenly the people around me ceased to exist, the music from the band grew softer and softer until it disappeared. I looked at my father. For a plit second, I did not even know who he was. Then I realized what he had said, and I began to cry loudly, great tearing sobs. I vaguely remember people staring at me as if I were ill. Papa just let me cry until it was all out of me.

"Oh, Papa, I don't understand this at all. We have been planning for such a long time to go to Palestine. We must go there. I don't want to go to America. Please, Papa," I sobbed, "you don't know what you're saying. Everyone is going to Palestine--Aunt Golda, Aunt Ruchel, Uncle Abrasha and Baby Mariam, everyone is expecting us there." I put my head down on the table and began to sob. "All my friends, Genevieve, Aria, Mariam from camp, Yakov, everyone is expecting me in Palestine. We are going there to build a new country. How can you not go there and help build the state?" I was angry now, accusing my father. He let me say everything and then quietly he spoke.

"My son, all those things you have said are true. Everyone is expecting us and we are needed to build the state. But Imic, listen to me, I am tired. I have worked very hard all my life and look what we have to show for it. I made a fortune in Brichen, we came to Rumania with practically nothing; I made another fortune in Bucharest and we are now in Vienna with only what I have made off the black market to show for our struggle. I am tired of struggling and never being able to have a place of my own. I am too old to keep starting over again and again. I want to go to America where there is no war and where I will have a good job and you will be able to have the good things in life..."

"No!" I screamed. "I don't care about the 'good things,' I must go to Palestine. And what about Nitza and your business plans?"

"Nitza understands me," Papa said quietly, looking at me. I lowered my eyes.

"Mama ... Mama will never go to America. Since she was a young girl she has dreamed of Palestine. I will speak to Mama."

"I have spoken to your mother, Imic, and she understands that we are going to America," he said softly. "But, of course, you may speak to her about it."

I couldn't believe it. Something had happened to my Papa while I was gone. He wanted to go to America when Jews were supposed to go to Palestine. My Mama, that I would never understand. I was sure that I could convince her to change her mind.

Papa talked a lot more about this woman he called Aunt Lizzie and Memphis, Tennessee. He said there was cotton growing everywhere there and that we would be welcome and the family would take care of us.

I couldn't imagine who this Aunt Lizzie was and why she would have been looking for us. I mean, after all, she never thought about us before. I didn't evenknow who she was before tonight.

America, ugh! All they had there were cowboys and indians and a lot of shooting.

When I told my Papa that there would be a war in America with the cowboys and indians in the "Old West," he just chuckled.

"But Papa, I saw all about it in the movies and they are absolutely true."

"That may have been tzue many years ago, Imic, but I understand that in America the streets are lined with gold," he said, and looked dreamily into the air.

I could see that I would have to talk to my mother. He was determined about America.

Papa and I didn't talk much on the way home. Several times I asked him why we weren't going and each time he responded by saying he was doing this for me, that in the long run, America would provide better chances for me as well as for him. I said, "Please don't do it for me," but he didn't seem to hear me.

"Mama," I said as soon as I saw her, and ran to her and put my arms around her waist. She had a knowing look in her eyes and glanced up at Papa, and then at me. I followed her into our little curtained-off room, and then I began to sob. "Mama, Mama, what has happened? Tell me, please Mama!"

She put her arms around me and held me to her. "Imic, my son, I know it is hard. It is hard for me too."

I looked up at her. Her face was hard and sad, and her eyes looked off into the distance. I buried my head against her.

"Your father has told you the truth," she went on. "He has worked very hard, and in Israel he would have to fight too. It would be dangerous. The Shainbergs are our family, Imic. They will help us. Your father is very tired. I am tired too."

"But Mama," I began.

"Imic, listen to me. America is a beautiful country. It is very rich. And there are a lot of Jews there. We will start a new life there that will be better than Brichen, than Bucharest. Life will be easier for all of us. It will be better for you."

I tried to speak again.

"Hush, Imic. It's hard to give up a dream. But your father is doing what he thinks is best. And he's doing it for all of us."

I looked at her face again. The tears were rolling down her cheeks. I knew that nothing I would say would change anything. We would not go to Palestine.

I ran out of our little room and into the hall. I bumped into Nitza. He took my hand. "Come, Imic. Let's go and talk." We went to a corner in another room and sat down. I cried out my story, but Nitza knew. He tried to make me understand about the war in Palestine and how Papa could do better in America and how I could have all the advantages in America.

I knew what he said was true, but still I couldn't forgive Papa. He had given in, and he had disappointed me. The Papa I always believed could do no wrong had done a terrible thing. I felt he had deserted me. And Mama, she too had chosen to take the easy way. When I spoke of these thoughts to Nitza, he listened quietly. Then he held me close, stroking my hair, and said, "Imic, please listen to me. I must make you understand something, something that is probably the most difficult thing you will ever have to understand. You have always thought your father was perfect and could never make a mistake. Many children feel that way about thei fathers, and that's good. What you are finding out is that your father is human. He is a person who does good things, but he also makes mistakes, just like all of us do. You feel that he chose the easy way of life. Maybe he did, but the thing you must not think is that he did it to hurt you. On the contrary, he made the decision in the hopes that you will someday have the chances that he never had. Do you understand at all, Imic?"

I had listened to what he had said and I felt that I was beginning to understand. It was like part of the hurt was gone that had filled me since Papa told me the news.

"I remember, Imic," Nitza continued, "when you were so upset with me for working the black market. Once you understood my reasons, you could accept it much easier. Isn't that true?"

"Yes," I replied, remembering. "I guess I found out you were human too," I said, and smiled.

"Be kind to Mama and Papa, Imic. They love you more than anything in the world and only want you to have the best. Please try and understand, my little man."

"I will, Nitza," I said, feeling much better than I had before. I didn't feel nearly as angry at Papa anymore.

I found Papa and hugged him hard. "Papa," I said, "I will try to understand your reasons for going to America, and I won't be angry anymore."

He looked at me with tears in his eyes. "Thank you, son."

SO AMERICA IT IS

In spite of everything, I began to be very excited about going to America. We were leaving Vienna soon, and then by train to Bremenhafen, Germany, where we would await passage on the American transport ship General Langfit.

Nitza gave me a book that told all about Tennesee and the city called Memphis. I was shocked by the pictures I saw. There were no cowboys and indians in the pictures, there were men and women and children who looked just like people I saw everyday. I learned that Memphis was located on a high bluff overlooking a river called the Mississippi. That was the strangest name I had ever heard. I used to say it all the time just to listen to how it sounded as it rolled out of my mouth. Memphis sounded like a very exciting town. I couldn't wait to see that big river.

I said goodbye to everyone and wrote a long letter to each person who was expecting me in Palestine explaining that our family in America desperately wanted us to come there to be with them. Once I had mailed the letters I felt much better, as if my last task was over. It was like saying a final goodbye.

Nitza and I cried together as we said goodbye. Somehow I knew that I would see him again, whether in America or Palestine.

"Nitza, I will never forget you," I cried. "You were my friend, my teacher, my, my ..." I burst into tears. "Oh Nitza, please write to me."

He hugged me tight and promised to write often.

Mama, Papa and I left the building and went to board the train for Germany.

I awoke slowly trying to understand where I was. My body was twisted in an uncomfortable position and I stretched my arms and legs and looked at Mama and Papa. They were sitting across from me, Mama with her head on Pap's shoulder, and their eyes closed. I could feel the rhythm of the train slowing and I touched Mama's hand lightly. "Are we almost there, Mama?"

She opened her eyes and smiled and I turned to look out the window. So this was Germany! I was sure it must be a terrible place. I had heard so many stories of Hitler and the Nazis. But it was not at all what I had expected. It was beautiful. The countryside was green and everything looked so clean. It was not much different than Austria.

The train stopped. We were in Bremenhafen. It looked like a big city. In the distance I could see big ships lined up. Was one of these ships waiting for us, to take us to America?

I followed Papa and Mama down the aisle of the railroad car and out to the platform. "Mr. Raboi?" a voice questioned.

"Yes," Papa said warily.

"I am Dyrkas of the Joint Distribution Agency. This is Miss Abramovitz. We will take you to the base where you'll be staying until your passage is arranged. We'll answer any questions you may have and also take care of the necessary paper work prior to your leaving. Shall we go?"

We followed Mr. Dyrkas and Miss Abramovitz down the long platform to a waiting car. I had many questions to ask--but I kept quiet and listened as Miss Abramovitz explained what would happen in the next few days.

"This is the harbor," she said pointing to the long row of ships standing in the water. "And those are transport ships. They carry troops from America to Europe and then transport immigrants to the United States and to South America. You will be going on a ship like one of these."

I stared at the ships. They were so big and gray. I couldn't imagine what it would be like to travel on one of these boats.

"In a few minutes," Miss Abramovitz continued, "we will arrive at the base. It is an American Army base that has certain areas set aside for those people, like yourselves, who are immigrating to other countries. You will be free to come and go as you please while you are waiting to leave. Meals will be served in the main dining room and laundry facilities are available. Do you have any questions?"

No one spoke. Finally I ~~said~~ asked, "Are the streets in America really paved with gold?"

She laughed and said, "Well, I don't know about that. It may be true, but I have never been there."

"You are very lucky to be going to America," Mr. Dyrkas said over his shoulder. "There are many people who want to go there but only those people who have a sponsor may go. I understand you have some family there who are expecting you."

"Yes," Papa replied, and then was silent.

We were turning now and entering through big iron gates. I could see rows of wooden buildings set side by side as well as many other buildings. We stopped at a small one where two men were standing. They were wearing American uniforms with arm bands that had "M.P." on them. They waved us on when they saw Mr. Dyrkas.

The car stopped in front of a long wooden building. Throughout the room there were rows of beds all neatly made, with crudely built partitions. We were assigned three beds and shown our closet. Miss Abramovitz told us it was now time for lunch, and we followed her to another big building. There were rows of tables and chairs and the room was filled with people--families and many soldiers. I was very curious about the Americans.

We got our food after standing in line and took it back to one of the long tables. An American soldier came and sat beside me. We smiled at each other and ate our lunch. He took something our of his pocket and put it into his mouth and began to chew it. Fascinated, I watched as he pulled in into long strings. I must have been staring because he pointed to the string and said "chewing gum." I repeated the words "chewing gum" and he reached into his pocket and gave me a piece of it. I unwrapped it and carefully put in into my mouth and began to chew. It was delicious, sweet and juicy. I smiled at him and he smiled back and said, "Ok?" I repeated htis strange word "Ok!" He smiled again. "Ok" must mean good, I thought. Now I knew three American words. I kept saying "chewing gum" and "Ok" to myself so I would not forget them.

Several people had stopped at our table to talk to Mama and Papa. They were speaking in Yiddish. The soldier looked at me and shrugged his shoulders in a gesture which said "I don't understand."

"Yiddish," I said and pointed to my mouth.

"Yiddish," he repeated. It seemed strange that we could understand each other without language. I wondered if anyone in America spoke Yiddish or if everyone spoke American.

Papa and Mama seemed to be waiting to leave. They made very little effort to meet people here on the base, they just sat and talked quietly to each other.

Papa had decided to take all of our money and buy merchandise with it to take to America to sell. He would buy cameras and jewelry because he heard they would bring a high price in America. Each morning he and Mama went to town and bought more things to take to America to sell.

I stayed at the base and watched the Americans. I was learning some new words besides "chewing gum" and "Ok." I learned that "Give me five" meant I was supposed to shake hands. I thought the Americans were very nice and I was beginning to feel better about going to America.

Mr. Dyrkas came to us one morning after we had been there almost two weeks. "This morning the Langfit arrived. By tomorrow morning you will be able to board. Please report this afternoon for final processing."

So that was it, it was finally going to happen. We were leaving Europe. The pain and all the terrible things that had happened to us would be over. But I felt very sad to be leaving everything I had ever known and starting all over.

We reported to Mr. Dyrkas' office at the appointed time and he began to ask Papa many questions about the Schainberg family.

He asked questions, questions I had heard many times before. I slipped out of the office and walked toward the tall gate from where the ships in the harbor could be seen.

THE END

There were many ships. Among them, standing tall and gray, was the U.S.S. General Langfit. I walked toward the entrance of the base and there stood two men wearing white helmets and M.P. armbands. They looked at me, smiled and waved me through. I walked toward the harbor and after a short while reached the General Langfit. She was the biggest thing I had ever seen. She could carry the entire world to America.

I walked into a little park not far from the harbor. I sat down on a small bench and began to think of all the things that had happened to me and the many people who loved me and whom I loved so much. I saw all their faces as if it were a dream. I saw my grandparents' faces before they died, and my other grandparents as they sat at the table in Brichen the night we left for Bucharest. Other faces came to me, Aunt Colda, Aunt Ruchel, Uncle Abrasha, Baby Mariam, other cousins left long ago. Nitza, sweet kind Nitza, smiling at me in an all-knowing way. Genevieve, Aria, the children I had made friends with. Everyone was smiling at me. I could feel tears coming into my eyes. My stomach was hurting badly. I closed my eyes and the faces disappeared. Would I ever see all these people again?

I brushed the tears from my eyes and looked up at the blue sky.

Suddenly another face came to me. A child's face but with eyes that looked so old. I knew the face. It was Manya. My little friend of so long ago. I would never forget her even in America. She would always be my secret friend and someday I would find her again.

I jumped up from the bench, the tears were coming fast, and I began to run. The wind stung my eyes and I could feel the pain in my stomach. I ran past the ships and toward the gates of the base. I was sobbing when I reached the little gate house. I had to get those faces out of my mind.

"Hey, boy," the M.P. said. "Hey, what's the matter?"

I stopped and he put his arm around my shoulder. "Nothing can be that bad, here try this." He handed me a chocolate bar. I nodded thanks and ran to the barracks. I went to my bed and lay down and buried my face in the pillow.

Everyone was packing. It was very quiet. No one was speaking. The only noise I could hear was the locks on suitcases being snapped shut. There was no excitement. It seemed that no one was quite sure about what he was doing.

I knew that this was it. Tomorrow we would board the ships and all this would be over. My whole life would be different. I was really very afraid now.

We slept that night in the clothes that we would wear in the morning. I couldn't sleep. I tossed and turned and listened to each squeak of the bed. First I was hot and then I was cold. Mama unpacked a blanket for me and then I was hot again. I must go to sleep. It must be very late now. I lay still and listened to the steady breathing of my parents. I counted the number of breaths I took in a minute and at last I could feel my body reacting. Sleep was coming and I would awaken in the morning and everything would be all right.

"Imic, Imic," a voice called from somewhere very far away. "Yes," I answered and suddenly the face was in front of me. It was Manya! I reached out to take the hand she extended towards me, but I kept missing her fingers. I ran to catch her, but she seemed to disappear into the air. Several times I ran after her but each time she disappeared. She was very pretty. Her blond hair was long and clung to her shoulders. Her cheeks were rosy and her eyes kept staring at me. I screamed her name and at last she spoke.

"Imic Raboi, I am your friend--but do not try to catch me."

"Why, Manya? Please do not be afraid, I just want to talk to you. I won't hurt you."

"Imic Raboi, today you will die," she said in a strange eerie voice.

"No, Manya, no," I said still trying to reach out to her.

"Yes, Imic. Today you will die and with you will die the fears, the hate and the terrors that you know. Tomorrow a new boy will live, one who will be unafraid, one who will trust and one who will be filled with hope."

"I don't understand, Manya," I cried. "What are you saying?"

"Some day you will understand."

"She beganto run and I ran after her. Suddenly a mist fell all around me and I could no longer see her. I could hear her voice vaguely now.

"Die, die, die," the voice said softly.

The mist was thicker now, surrounding me. I pushed against the fog to clear the air but it was very thick. I fell to the ground and waved my arms and legs, but the air was so heavy I couldn't breathe. I was suffocating. I tried to scream but no sound came. I lay still on the ground, watching the gray fog cover my body. I took tiny breaths now and tried once more to scream. Somehow I wasn't afraid. I knew I couldn't breathe but I wasn't afraid. Through the mist I could see a tiny ray of light. It came from far away and made a hole in the grayness. I could climb out through that hole. I put my mouth on the spot where the light hit the ground. I could look straight up from the ground through the fog. I took a deep breath and screamed with all my might.

"Imic, Imic, wake up, you've had a nightmare. Please, Imic, wake up."

I opened my eyes and saw my Mama bending over me.

"Oh, Mama," I cried and put my arms around her neck. Papa was up now and standing beside my bed. "You've had a bad dream, my son," he said, smoothing my hair.

"Yes, Papa, that's what it was."

"Do you want to tell us about it?" Mama asked.

"Not now, Mama, I just want to go back to sleep. I'm so tired, I must think, must think. A new boy, to be a new boy," I replied half-awake.

I recall the look in Mama's eyes as she stroked my hair and wiped my brow. "Don't worry, Chava," Papa said, "he's just very tired and very excited. Everything will be all right." They looked at each other and down at me and I was asleep.

A deep, deep sleep.